

# **An exploration of the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice, with specific reference to a teenage pregnancy project in Delft**

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any  
degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this  
dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been

cited and referenced.

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## **Abstract**

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APPLIED THEATRE AND COMMUNITY BUILDING PRACTICE, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO A TEENAGE PREGNANCY PROGRAM IN DELFT.**

In a developing country such as South Africa, the challenge to locate new, effective methods of social development is key. This study argues that applied theatre has the potential to become a powerful medium for the fulfilment of this aim. The development and performance of this kind of theatre, which occurs outside of conventional theatre settings and deals with social issues in a participatory way with its audience, brings people of different genders, ages, races and classes together. In doing so, a community is formed, dynamic and multidimensional in nature. This is a divergence from conventional understandings of community as a single static, objective entity. Community building practice centres around this reconceptualisation of community, providing an orientation to the ways in which people who identify as members of a shared community engage together in the process of community change.

Drawing specifically on experiences from the author's participation in an applied theatre program in Delft, a major township community outside Cape Town, this study explores the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice. For those unfamiliar with the field of applied theatre, the working process that was undertaken during the Teenage Pregnancy Group (TPG) project is described in detail, with four main dramatic and theatrical elements emerging as pivotal – icebreakers, role-plays, discussions and playmaking. This serves to concretise the potentially abstract reflection on the artistic process. In a bid to understand the role that these dramatic and theatrical elements played in the building of the TPG community, interviews with the six actors in the play were coded. While these semi-structured, in-depth interviews had been conducted prior to the commencement of this study, the general nature of the questions, which focused on the whole TPG process, meant that the answers remained relevant to this exploration.

The codes generated from the interviews were organised so that essential themes could emerge. It became clear that the actors placed emphasis on three (often overlapping) elements – participation throughout the process, having the opportunity to both learn and teach other TPG members and the development that they felt had occurred individually and as a group. These are in line with the central principles of community building practice, which distances itself from traditional top-down methods of community development in favour of a more horizontal approach. Instead of perpetuating the traditional divisions between expert/layman, rich/poor, skilled/unskilled and outsiders to the community and those within its boundaries, community building practice attempts to empower all involved in an upliftment initiative with the understanding that they are essential and valued members of the community. By encouraging true participation, presenting an opportunity to learn and to teach, and stimulating the development of both self and team, applied theatre provides an opportunity for participants to become conduits for a horizontal flow of information, experiences and skills that empower all involved.

The study concludes that applied theatre is a useful instrument with which to fulfil community building practice's core principles. While it acknowledges that only one applied theatre project has been analysed in-depth, it is understood that the dramatic elements identified in the TPG project are universal to applied theatre undertakings. Also, this study has drawn on a number of other applied theatre projects, both in South Africa and abroad. It appears that aside from proving useful in fulfilling various social education aims, there is potential for applied theatre's powers to be harnessed in more social development initiatives.

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## Preface

In his article *Here We Are: Social Theatre and Some Open Questions about Its Development*, Guglielmo Schininá (2004) describes his training in traditional theatre. He writes that although he became physically skilled, he often felt intellectually frustrated. When discussing this with his instructors, he would usually be met with the response that theatre was not an intellectual activity. He writes:

*'Contradictions like this made me feel that the theatre would not take me where I wanted to go. Using today's terminology, I would argue that it was totally unclear to me why it was good to create islands where a limited number of people (usually wealthy intellectuals) were able to develop their global unintellectual communication skills and simultaneously lose their ability to interact with their local contexts. Although I felt comfortable in these "theatre islands," I missed the bridges connecting me to the wider society.'*

*(Schininá, 2004: 22)*

Coming across Schininá's experience was an important eye-opener for me as it served to put into words a feeling that I had been grappling with throughout my drama studies. Although I had always enjoyed my experiences with theatre in the past, I couldn't help feeling unsatisfied by my participation in it. Since I am not an actor and have never felt drawn towards conventional theatre-making, I began to question my involvement with the field. I felt as if there was an element of communication that was lacking. While the small size of Cape Town's theatre community means that people know each other and are able to share their work and support one another, I - like Schininá - felt somehow claustrophobic. I always felt that there was something 'out there', beyond the theatre-world that I knew so well, that I wanted to engage with.

My experience with the Teenage Pregnancy Group (TPG) pointed me in the direction of this previously abstract 'place', where I could utilise my theatre skills in a wider context. For a period of four months beginning April 2004 I participated in the development of a piece of interactive theatre about teenage pregnancy in Delft, a

township on the outskirts of Cape Town. Over the course of my drama studies I had read much literature around the different ways that theatre could be used for social development, so I did have a theoretical understanding of why those overseeing the project had determined theatre a useful medium for putting their message across. This, however, was where my experience with the medium ended. Never having actually facilitated the creation of a piece of applied theatre, I was unsure of what to expect, as well as what was expected of me. Intimidated as I was by the daunting prospect of being responsible for the development of a quality piece of theatre in an unfamiliar context, working with people I didn't know, I tried not to let the task overwhelm me. From the start I resolved to treat the project as a learning experience, contributing as much energy and skills as I possibly could while not being shy to ask for help when it was needed.

I was lucky that the team that I worked with over the course of the project were generally supportive and encouraging. Although, with the exception of my Masters supervisor Assoc. Prof. Morris who regularly offered me direction and guidance, I was the only drama facilitator involved with the project, I can lay very little claim to the perceived success of the teenage pregnancy play. The actors, the support staff, even the learners for whom the play was being devised all contributed immensely to the final product that toured schools in Delft, Belhar and Atlantis. Adopting a collaborative model of theatre-making allowed me to grow over the course of the project. Because we all played a part in developing the play, I was able to learn from those with whom I worked. The experience of engaging deeply, both personally and professionally, with people outside my usual social sphere opened my eyes to the many alternative narratives that exist in the city in which I live.

Having the opportunity to explore and extend my skills through my involvement with the TPG made me realise that there are contexts further afield in which my theatre skills can be valuable, and that my years pursuing knowledge in the area have not gone to waste. Added to this, a semester spent abroad at a university in Massachusetts, USA, in early 2005 helped me identify the intersection of theatre and community as the focus for this study. Whilst at UMass, I took classes at the School of Public Health, in community-oriented subjects such as community development and community health

education. Coming into contact with these new areas of study grounded the applied theatre work that I had already done in South Africa upon a firm theoretical base, and provided me with knowledge of strategies and theories that I will be able to use in the future to bolster my efforts. During the classes I had much opportunity to relate what I was learning to the fields of theatre and drama. The strong emphasis on teamwork that had been so apparent during the teenage pregnancy theatre initiative led me to hypothesise that there may be certain crossovers between applied theatre and community building.

On my return to South Africa, I decided that it would be worthwhile to use my thesis as an opportunity to rigourously interrogate the TPG project in order to solidify the academic 'journey' I had taken over the course of my Master's degree. A thorough, in-depth examination of the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice seemed appropriate – not only to satisfy an academic requirement, but as an exercise in personal development, bringing together my areas of interest in order to propel me forward in my chosen career path. The aim of this study is to get a deeper understanding of the practical process that I engaged in as a way to learn from the experience so that the work that I, and hopefully others, do in the future can have maximum efficacy.



## Introduction

As South Africa continues its journey along the path of democracy, the challenge of decreasing the vast inequalities between rich and poor remains key to our future. With poverty a massive contributor to social issues such as substance abuse, crime, the spread of HIV/AIDS and domestic violence, locating methodologies that will result in the upliftment of our citizens remains imperative in the creation of a better life for all. Community development initiatives, which target localised, contained groups of people as the recipients of their efforts, are a popular vehicle for social upliftment. Traditional methods of community development often see aid being transferred in a top-down manner from an outside organisation or individual to an underprivileged community that has been perceived as needy. While the money or skills that flow into a community will most probably be welcomed and appreciated, this one-way flow of resources does nothing to change the social system that has resulted in the underdevelopment in the first place. Often, the disadvantaged community does not have the necessary resources and infrastructure to properly manage the aid that they receive. Also, constantly perceiving themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders may result in members of underprivileged communities becoming mainly consumers of services from outside the community with no incentive to become producers themselves (McKnight & Kretzmann, 2002: 158). This serves to entrench the dominant social hierarchy, preventing any decline in the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

The search for new, more interactive, inclusive and effective methods of community development is constant, as illustrated by the abundant literature available as well as the many initiatives underway at any given time. In his theory of action for the freeing of the oppressed which he sets forth in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1972) explains that the goal of development initiatives should be to transform the very structure of society (Freire, 1972: 48), rather than attempting to integrate the oppressed into the existing structure of oppression. The traditional top-down method of community development should be replaced by a scenario in which individuals are given the opportunity to take action in their own upliftment. Through a cycle of listening-dialogue-action, with emphasis on equality and mutual respect, all participants

should be able to ‘listen for the issues contained in their own experiences, discuss common problems, look for root causes... and devise strategies to help transform their reality’ (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 290*).

Although various models of community development exist which embrace Freire’s theories to a lesser or greater degree, Cheryl Walter’s (2002) community building practice seems to me to best embody his vision of a transformed society. The reconceptualisation of community on which Walter’s practice is built means that community is viewed as a ‘multidimensional/dynamic whole or system of which we are a part’ (*Walter, 2002: 70*). Organisers, facilitators, funders, community members and any other bodies involved in a development initiative are understood to be part of a single community, working towards the achievement of shared goals. At the very heart of community building practice lies a commitment to the elimination of the traditional hierarchy between organiser and community, encouraging rather an ethos of collaboration and mutual support.

There are a myriad of developmental factors that could be examined in light of the TPG project, but most are beyond the scope of this paper. The limited scope of any dissertation demands that the researcher prioritise the issues that he/she believes will best serve both personal and practical aims. My decision to focus this thesis specifically on how applied theatre relates to this reconceptualisation of community is important for a number of reasons. Practically, this study is being completed in partial fulfilment of a Masters in Applied Theatre and Drama Studies and as such, a performing arts bent is expected. Personally, nearing the completion of my studies, I wish to gain a deeper understanding of how the practical work that I have done has impacted my personal development within my field.

Having facilitated the development of the TPG project, I recognised that several key principles of community building practice underlay the process that my co-participants and I undertook. Drawing on the resources and skills of all involved, including doctors, nurses, administrative staff, the actors, the learners for whom we performed, my Masters supervisor and myself, I believe that a community, multidimensional and

dynamic in nature, emerged over the course of the project. It is my contention that the icebreakers, role-plays, discussions and playmaking that were undertaken during the applied theatre project contributed to the implementation of the principles of community building practice. Examining *how* this occurred is a central component of this study.

This study draws on primary and secondary sources in order to inform the reader's understanding of the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice and the possible potential that this holds for social development work with communities. Chapter 1 draws on a variety of literary sources in a bid to create a firm theoretical grounding on which to build my argument regarding the process of community building that I believe took place during the TPG project. Key issues are highlighted and defined. Applied theatre projects from diverse contexts are drawn on in order to provide practical support for the theories laid forth. Chapter 2 refers directly to the TPG project, providing a contextual overview and outlining the theoretical framework that underlies this study, as influenced by the concepts developed in Chapter 1 and my experience of participation in the TPG.

As the study moves towards a more intricate examination of the processes that took place during the different stages of the TPG, Chapter 3 highlights some validity issues that arose during the completion of this study. Some of these are endemic to qualitative studies in general, while others focus more specifically on the issues surrounding the documentation of something as ephemeral as an applied theatre performance. In Chapter 4 I provide an analysis of the dramatic and theatrical elements that were utilised in both the theatre-making and performance phases of the TPG project. This is not only essential for the reader who, inexperienced in applied theatre, needs to be familiarised with the processes that take place during such projects. Personally, it has been useful to analyse the tools and techniques that I have come to use almost instinctually in the field simply because I know that they work and are effective. Understanding the deeper processes at work within my own practice concretises my experiences and renders this reflective journey through the TPG project especially useful to my development as an applied theatre practitioner and a scholar. Drawing on interviews with the other TPG members, Chapter 5 presents an explication of how the elements described in Chapter 4

facilitate the implementation of the principles of community building practice. In concluding the study, Chapter 6 draws together the ideas and perspectives of Chapters 1 to 5, examining the implications of the TPG project and the possibilities that these suggest for the use of applied theatre as a tool for community building and social development.

This study attempts to provide the reader with a nuanced understanding of the processes that underlay the TPG project. This fulfils dual purposes: it serves as a permanent record of what occurred during the project and also provides those unfamiliar with the field of applied theatre with an in-depth understanding of what occurs during such an initiative. However, this study attempts to delve deeper than a reflective description of process. My hope is that it will shed light on some practices that those who use theatre as a means of social change view as commonplace, providing an element of depth to the reader's understandings regarding applied theatre. In articulating applied theatre's relationship to community building practice, my hope is that the potential that I believe applied theatre holds for making meaningful social change becomes apparent to my readers.

# CHAPTER 1

## Literature Review

In a bid to locate a starting point from which to launch this literary survey I was drawn to the theories of Paolo Freire. While Freire is certainly not the only educationalist to have considerable impact on the development of educational practice, he certainly contributed significantly to modern thinking regarding informal and popular education. Freire's ability to 'draw upon, and weave together, a number of strands of thinking about educational practice and liberation' (<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-freir.htm>) means that his work appeals to individuals beyond conventional educational settings. An emphasis on issues such as dialogue, conscientisation and empowerment makes his theory of action for the freeing of the oppressed a useful model to utilise as I move towards the formulation of an understanding of the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice. It is my contention that these two fields are complementary and that their interaction holds much potential for achieving social change that embodies Freirean principles.

### 1.1. The influence of Paolo Freire

In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) Freire outlines a theory of action which he argues will result in the freeing of the oppressed from the control of their oppressors. Fundamental to his argument is a radical reversal of what he calls the 'banking' concept of education, a term he uses to describe traditional, top-down methods of education in which the 'scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits' (Freire, 1972: 46) of communiqués issued by the teacher. In a likening to the world of banking, the students are simply the depositories of knowledge, and the teacher the depositor.

Arising in part as a response to this, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is based on a 'problem-posing education' (Freire, 1972: 52) in which the educational goal of deposit-making is replaced with enabling empowerment through the posing of the problems of

people in their relations with the world. Freire argues that in order to increase the alienation and passivity of the oppressed, the oppressors develop a series of methods that show the world as a 'fixed entity, as something given – something to which men, as mere spectators, must adapt' (Freire, 1972: 109). Problem-posing education breaks this stasis by presenting students with problems relating to themselves 'in the world and with the world' (Freire, 1972: 54). The argument is that this will make them feel challenged, and obliged to respond to that challenge with action. Breaking the one-way, vertical flow of information inherent in banking education, teachers and students engage in dialogue over problems, thereby becoming jointly responsible for a process in which all grow, with the knowledge, beliefs and opinions of all being valued and shared. Problem-posing education is 'co-intentional' in that teachers and students, co-intent on reality, are both subjects, 'not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge' (Freire, 1972: 44).

Likening the traditional teacher-student relationship, with all its inherent power inequalities, to that between the oppressors and the oppressed, Freire argues that this new understanding of reality, attained through reflection and action, will have the effect of committed involvement of the oppressed in their own liberation as they realise their ability to permanently re-create their own reality, just as students learn to take part in the re-creation of their world. Freire argues that even well-intentioned attempts by educators or humanitarians to 'give knowledge' to the oppressed, or to impose upon them a one-size-fits-all model of 'liberation' is destined to fail because 'the object of action should be the reality to be transformed by them together with other men – not the other men themselves' (Freire, 1972: 66). Rather than viewing the oppressed as marginals, as people living outside of society, we should realise that they are a part of the structure which keeps them controlled by others. Instead of attempting to integrate them into the structure of oppression, we should 'transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves"' (Freire, 1972: 48).

While Freire's pedagogy offers a synthesis of understandings from diverse fields such as education, cultural studies and social development into a theory of action for the

freeing of the oppressed, the challenge this poses for practitioners working for the empowerment, conscientisation and upliftment of underprivileged communities is to find practical ways to foster its implementation. In order to enact Freire's call for a 'transformation of the system' that sees the voices, knowledge and resources of the oppressed being valued and utilised in their empowerment process, a model of development needs to be located that allows all involved to work together for betterment.

Freire argues that there is a need for the dichotomous roles of the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher to cease to exist; rather, they should become 'critical co-investigators' (*Freire, 1972: 54*), with the students – no longer passive listeners – entering into dialogue with the teacher, and the teacher re-examining his/her earlier considerations as the students express their own. This is an important lesson for those working in the field of community development. It suggests that for optimum efficacy, a structure needs to exist within a community empowerment effort that provides space for this sort of communication to occur.

Various models of community organisation exist which embrace Freire's theories to a lesser or greater extent. Jack Rothman's (*1987, cit. Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 284*) typology remains a core categorising method in the field. He believes that the field consists of three distinct models of practice: locality development, social planning and social action. Locality development is heavily process oriented, stressing consensus, cooperation, the creation of group identity and a sense of community. In contrast to this, social planning is task oriented, with an emphasis on rational-empirical problem-solving, usually by an outside expert. Finally, social action is both task and process oriented and is concerned with increasing the problem-solving ability of the community and achieving concrete changes to redress imbalances of power between the group and the larger society.

While Rothman's typology has been dominant for many years (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 284*), there are several limitations to it. Primarily, the dynamic nature of development work may lead to a project drawing on two or more of the models, rather

than relying solely on one. Also, as highlighted by de Beer and Swanepoel (1998), rigidly adhering to a structure such as one of the above may result in a development undertaking being 'too formalised, too discreet, too well planned' (*de Beer & Swanepoel, 1998: 50*). They argue that this will result in taking away the incremental and experiential nature of the learning process, and that as well-defined frameworks, they may be misused to control instead of embodying uncertain development efforts. Finally, the fact that Rothman's typology is problem based and organiser centred 'constitutes a philosophical and practical limitation that may be particularly problematic as organising increasingly occurs in multicultural contexts' (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 285*).

This final limitation brings to mind Freire's call to move away from the hierarchies that traditionally govern student/teacher, oppressed/oppressor, community/organiser relationships. A structure which allows for the strengths of all parties to be utilised to their fullest in order to achieve positive ends needs to emerge in order for maximum efficacy to occur. Additionally, de Beer and Swanepoel argue that in order to avoid institutional problems and inconsistencies, community organisation needs 'another type of organisation with another type of attitude' (*de Beer & Swanepoel, 1998: 44*). They go on to cite Korten (1980) as saying that it needs organisations '... with a well developed capacity for responsive and anticipatory adaptation – organisations that (a) embrace error; (b) plan with the people; and (c) link knowledge-building with action'. It is my belief that by embodying these characteristics, the relatively new model of community building practice provides an important alternative approach to community development.

## **1.2. Community Building Practice**

### **1.2.1. Reconceptualising Community**

In her article *Using Theory to Frame Community and Practice*, Mary Domahidy (2003) suggests that practitioners preparing to work in a community setting need to become aware of their habits of thought in order to choose consciously how to think about both



community and practice (*Domahidy, 2003*). Her words ring true when one considers how one's conceptualisation of 'community' may affect the way one approaches specific communities in the context of carrying out community development, organising or building work. For example, the extent to which community is seen as a 'single, objective entity that can be shaped by conscious design and rational action', or as 'an arena shaped by the ongoing interaction of those who engage in the process' (*Domahidy, 2003: 78*) will dictate whether practitioners see community as something external – to be acted on and managed, or as an organism of which they are a part, constantly evolving and being recreated through interactions on multiple levels.

The term 'community' is certainly problematic. In the 1950's, sociologist George A. Hillery Jr. famously described ninety-four use-definitions of 'community' with very little in common among them (*cit. Kuflinec, 1996: 91*). Bhattacharyya (2004) urges the move away from the assumption that place (urban, rural or otherwise) is an inextricable element of community – a common understanding of community being that it is geographically based. He rebukes this thinking for three reasons. Firstly, it takes the meaning of community as self-evident, automatically assuming that a neighbourhood or village is a community irrespective of whether there even exists a sense of cohesiveness. Secondly, grounding community purely in geographical terms disallows an understanding of community that transcends all connections with place, such as a solidarity based on shared interests or circumstances (for example, the Jewish community or the medical community). Finally, it fails to take into account the effects of modernity, which has resulted in social activities no longer limited to the confines of a specific 'place' but occurring in unknown and abstract places and spaces. Bhattacharyya argues that a broader concept of community would not prevent us from seeing or developing community where place retains its significance, while allowing us the space to focus on the widest range of communities.

Minkler and Wallerstein (2002) summarise that communities have been defined as '(1) functional spatial units meeting basic needs for sustenance, (2) units of patterned social interaction, and/or (3) symbolic units of collective identity' (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 282*). They also highlight a fourth definition, attributed to Eng and Parker (1994)

which defines community as a social unit that sees people coming together to act politically and make changes. Kuftinec notes that the challenge in defining community lies in the fact that the term suggests positive connotations without clear meaning (*Kuftinec, 1996: 91*). However, for Bhattacharyya, the quality that unites these different understandings of community is ‘solidarity’ (*Bhattacharya, 2004*), which he defines as a ‘shared identity (derived from place, ideology, or interest) and a code for conduct or norms, both deep enough that a rupture affects the members emotionally and other ways’.

Cheryl Walter (2002) proposes changing focus from ‘the community as a social/demographic entity or unit with which we interact, to community as a multidimensional/dynamic whole or system of which we are a part’ (*Walter, 2002: 70*). According to her, all the various dimensions that characterise community, such as people, organisations, consciousness, actions, and context, are integrally related with one another, forming the whole that is community. Roland Warren (1963) distinguishes between two dimensions of community, the horizontal (referring to the relation of local units, or what is commonly thought of as community) and the vertical (referring to the relation of local units to extracommunity systems) (*Warren, 1963 cit. Walter, 2002: 70*). It is clear from his terminology (‘extracommunity systems’) that he does not perceive relationships with more remote organisations to involve community. Walter, on the other hand, suggests that every organisation and person at every level within both the horizontal and vertical dimensions are potentially part of community.

Together with this conceptualisation of community as multidimensional and inclusive and Bhattacharyya’s focus on solidarity, my understanding of community is also strongly informed by Warren’s (1963) theory of community action and Walter’s subsequent understandings. Warren posits that there is no pre-existing community that takes action; rather, for each episode of action, an ad hoc body emerges or is formed (*Warren, 1963 cit. Walter, 2002: 71*). Looked at this way, community can be described as dynamic and emergent in that ‘it is continually being created and re-created, its parameters and relationships taking shape and changing shape, through the actions and interactions of people and organisations’ (*Walter, 2002: 71*).

### 1.2.2. Implications on Practice

This reconceptualisation of community provides us with an answer to Freire's calls for a transformed structure of society. By creating a space where a myriad of voices come together and are respected for their contributions, the stage is set for action based on the principle of equality, the valuing of individual knowledge and positive, participatory transformation to occur. Viewing community in this new way has considerable implications for community practice, which Walter outlines in her study (*Walter, 2002: 74*). First, 'it places community, not the community and not the community organiser, at the center of practice'. Second, 'thinking of community as multidimensional, involving people and organisations at many levels, consciousness, actions, and contexts, allows us to model greater complexity'. Third, 'if we perceive community not as an existing unit that needs to be organised differently but as a dynamic and emergent whole embodying various degrees of 'community-ness' that is continually being built or created, then the building of community will be one of the central concerns and activities of community practice'. Finally, 'community practice then becomes less of an intervention or coming between and more an interchange, where each of us is changed through coming together' (*Walter, 2002: 73-75*). This is certainly in line with Freire's call for the abolition of banking education in favour of an educative milieu in which all involved are open and vulnerable to transformation through the process. Community practice becomes less of a method than a way of orienting one's self in community (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 285*).

### 1.2.3. Community Building Practice Defined

In *Community Building: Building Community Practice*, Weil (1996) posits that the high level of political divisiveness, the growing chasm between poor and rich people, the tenacity of racism and the disappearance of jobs for low-skilled, low-literacy workers all highlight the need to find ways to reconnect people and communities into a more civil and just society (*Weil, 1996: 482*). Writing almost a decade ago, her words still ring true for contemporary experience. In reconceptualising community as a dynamic, multi-level system, community building practice, as envisioned by Walter (2002), aims

to build the capacity of the entire system and all of its participants. It does this by emphasising community strengths, not as nostalgia for the ‘good old days’ but as a diversity of groups and systems that can identify shared values and nurture the development of shared goals (*Gardner cit. Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 285*). In doing so, community building practice supports and fosters positive connections among individuals, groups, organisations, neighbourhoods and geographic and functional communities to create a ‘communal infrastructure’ (*Weil, 1996: 482*) that can support positive community development.

Weil describes two branches of community work. The first involves direct community work such as organising, social planning and economic and social development within a geographic or functional community, while the second focuses on interorganisational work, such as interagency planning, fundraising and resource development and coordination (*Weil, 1996: 486*). While Weil acknowledges the importance of both of these branches ‘if society is to achieve social justice and participatory democracy characterised by inclusiveness, an end to racism, and nonsexist communities and institutions’ (*Weil, 1996: 486*), community building practice takes her concepts further by conceptualising these two branches as being fundamentally intertwined. Walter (2002) describes how community building practice is also carried out by two constituencies –those residing in the neighbourhood or closest to the issue in terms of experience may be seen as ‘local/intimately involved’, while those farther removed are said to be more ‘remote’ (*Walter, 2002: 71*). However, where Walter’s vision differs from Weil’s is in the former’s conception of both those local or remote in relation to the issue at hand being viewed as part of the same system, and all activities undertaken by either being fundamentally linked in their striving for the same goals. Thus Walter’s conception of community building practice offers an orientation to the ways in which people who identify as members of a shared community engage together in the process of community change (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 279*).

Minkler and Wallerstein identify several concepts inherent in community building that are central to instituting and measuring change on the community level (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 288*). ‘Empowerment’ refers to a social action process whereby

people gain mastery over their own lives, in order to assume greater power or expand their power from within to create desired change. 'Critical consciousness', a concept that was initially developed by Freire (1972), is a consciousness based on reflection and action in making change, which sees people engage in dialogue that roots causes and community action. 'Community capacity' refers to a community's characteristics that affect its ability to identify, mobilise and address problems. An increase in community capacity sees community members participating actively in the life of their community through leadership, social networks and access to power. 'Issue selection' is also considered a central concept of community building. This refers to identifying winnable and specific targets of change that unify and build community strength. Issues are identified through community participation; targets are located as part of a larger strategy. Finally, 'participation and relevance' refers to 'starting where the people are' and engaging community members as equals, so that community members create their own agenda based on felt needs, shared power and awareness of resources.

While these concepts may exist to varying degrees in development initiatives, Walter points out that the word 'community' is often used even where little true community can be found (*Walter, 2002: 72*). Organisations may undertake community development initiatives based on community participation, which, when scrutinised, turn out to be little more than poorly-disguised endeavours to attain cheap labour (*de Beer & Swanepoel, 1998: 21*). Certain individuals may represent themselves as leaders of the community in order to increase their own power, with no actual intention of contributing to the well-being of the people whom they claim to represent. In these situations, Walter highlights that:

*'Community has to do not just with engagement in relationship but with the quality of the relationship. Calling something community does not necessarily make it so. There can be greater or lesser degrees of "community-ness".'*

*(Walter, 2002: 73)*

Selznick (*cit. Walter, 2002: 73*) refers to the indicators of 'community-ness' as the elements of community. He defines these elements as historicity, identity, mutuality,

plurality, autonomy, participation, and integration. He argues that the rich and balanced presence of these seven elements is what makes for a fully realised community. With community both as a dynamic system and, indeed, a quality of experience, these elements serve as benchmarks from which development practitioners can assess the capacity of existing communities or evaluate the efficacy of development initiatives.

An understanding of community as a multidimensional, dynamic, emergent system compels those working in the field to take into account the influence of their roles as community practitioners, the organisations they work for and their or a funder's agendas, as well as the broader culture's consciousness around an issue (*Walter, 2002: 69*). The risk of oversimplifying an issue or being self-serving instead of community serving is averted. Practitioners and development organisations are no longer 'outsiders' who invade a community in order to carry out traditional community development of the top-down variety, but are rather a part of the same system as those with whom they work. In contrast to notions of community practice that employ methods that are 'community based' but not necessarily of and by the community (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 285*), community building practice encompasses the feminist notions of 'power with' and 'power to' rather than more traditional and hierarchical notions of 'power over' (*Minkler, 2002: 8*). In this way, it transforms the way community development takes place – the various multidimensional elements of community become 'potential collaborators toward a win-win situation' (*Bradshaw, 1994, cit. Minkler, 2002: 8*).

## **1.3. Applied Theatre**

### **1.3.1. Using Theatre for Social Change**

It can be argued that all theatre, to a lesser or greater degree, can be used to achieve social change and development. The feelings of 'animation, connection, and heightened awareness' (*Bundy, 2002*) that Bundy states must be present in order for a spectator to engage aesthetically with a theatrical event can exist in the most traditional of theatre contexts. According to her, aesthetic engagement is a necessary precursor for a

significant learning experience to occur, which may be the spur for an individual to take action that leads to change. Animation is the feeling of stimulation, often exhilaration, experienced during and after a drama or theatre experience, leaving the person feeling more alive, more aware of him/herself, the surrounding world, and the relationship between the two. Connection occurs as the individual grapples with his/her commitment to the metaphorical world of the play, making associations between the world of the drama and his/her real world existence. Heightened awareness develops as the he/she becomes aware of the relationship between the events on the stage and the greater social world in which he/she exists, thus reducing exclusive focus on the stage action.

An effective production of Shakespeare's *Othello*, with its poetic text, stirring plot and eventual tragic ending may engage its audience members aesthetically. The undercurrents of racial tensions and the universality of the love story between the title character and Desdemona make the play exceedingly contemporary and easy to relate to for audiences today, even though it was written centuries ago. Watching the play, we constantly make connections between what we see on the stage and our own lives and the world around us. Living in a time of war, we engage with the context of the play. We wonder whether, if we were in Othello's situation, we too would have fallen for Iago's scheming. Would we have had the precognition to see through his fake camaraderie to the immensity of the hate that he holds? Can we ever really be sure that the people that we trust are, in fact, on our side? Engaging aesthetically with the play provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our own beliefs and understandings, which may provide the impetus for a change in behaviour.

Leigh Anne Howard (2004), however, points out that in traditional theatre, the performance points out the need to change, or indicates that indeed a change has occurred, but does so without teaching us *how* that change might take place (Howard, 2004: 222). We leave the theatre with a moral, with the inference that the play would have ended differently had the character made different decisions, but we do not learn what specific action or behaviour would have changed the outcome. What strategy should Othello have adopted in order not to fall prey to Iago's malice? We learn that problems have solutions, but rarely learn what these are, and at no stage do we have the

opportunity to create and test these solutions. According to Howard, ‘these performances stop short of exploring the specific actions a person can take to become an agent who can and will enact change’ (Howard, 2004: 222). It was precisely this quality that theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht sought to redress in his *epic theatre* which he developed in the early 1930’s as a reaction to the dominance of well-made plays and naturalistic acting-styles (Lennard & Luckhurst, 2002: 101). His innovative practice of awakening his audience’s intellectual faculties, making them question events on stage and think about alternative actions through distancing devices, collaborative theatre-making techniques and treatment of contemporary politics have continued to influence playwrights and theatre-companies worldwide (Lennard & Luckhurst, 2002: 245).

### 1.3.2. Applied Theatre Defined

Thompson and Schechner (2004) note a trend in theatre history whereby during the 1960’s, traditional commercial theatre – which aimed its work at a ‘narrow, moneyed, entertainment-seeking audience’ (Thompson & Schechner, 2004: 11) – began to decline due to financial factors, changing urban demographics and an increase in competing forms of entertainment. ‘The theatre’ ceased to exist as a single entity; instead there emerged many different kinds of theatre, including what we now refer to as ‘applied theatre’. This relatively new term brings together a broad range of dramatic activities carried out by a number of diverse bodies and groups (Ackroyd, 2000). While practitioners in the fields of community theatre, theatre for development, theatre in education, drama in education, social theatre and other diverse practices may see their work as dramatically different (and, as Ackroyd points out, may be ‘dragged screaming’ into a single bundle), applied theatre has come to refer to a theatre that is:

*‘...not simply a presentational medium that occurs within a conventional theatre house. This is a theatre that is taken out into nontheatrical settings... for the purpose of helping the audience, or the participants, grapple with an issue, event, or question of immediate public and personal concern’.*

*(Taylor, 2003: xx).*



This definition leaves space for much of the plurality that exists between different theatre groups such as those mentioned before. Ackroyd suggests that what they all do have in common is that they ‘share a belief in the power of the theatre form to address something beyond the form itself’ (*Ackroyd, 2000*). Applied theatre is ‘theatre with social agendas; theatre where aesthetics is not the ruling objective; theatre outside the realm of commerce... and the cult of the new’ (*Thompson & Schechner, 2004:12*). While applied theatre programs may have different purposes – for example to raise awareness, pose alternatives, heal psychological wounds or barriers, challenge contemporary discourses and voice the views of the silent and marginal (*Taylor, 2003: xxi-xxvi*), there are several qualities that can be included on the list of ‘family resemblance’ (*Rasmussen, 2000*) that draws the field of applied theatre together.

Both Ackroyd and Taylor highlight that the attempt to create transformation is a key criterion of applied theatre (*Ackroyd 2000; Taylor, 2003: xxx*). Audience participation is another distinguishing feature. But, as highlighted in the *Othello* example above, Ackroyd points out that to some extent all theatre forms entail some element of transformation (however minimal), just as they entail some form of participation from the audience (*Ackroyd, 2000*). She describes her reaction to a performance of Kushner’s *Angels in America* which, while not conventionally classified as applied theatre, had a profound effect on her as an audience member. But, she goes on to argue, it is also difficult to envisage a piece that could bring about complete transformation or complete participation.

Thus, in highlighting the complexities involved in delineating theatre and applied theatre, Ackroyd proposes that the distinction between the two fields is a matter of degree. She suggests that we draw two continua perpendicular to one another to form a cross. The first continuum

*‘...relates to the degree to which theatre forms are attempting to effect transformation; the second relates to the degree of audience participation... We should not expect any theatre forms to be placed at extreme ends of either. Most*

*forms and text which we would consider to be in the domain of applied theatre are located in the right hand quadrant.*

*(Ackroyd, 2000)*

This understanding of applied theatre is a useful move away from the notion of two distinct forms, 'theatre' and 'applied theatre'. It reminds us that nothing on the continuum suggested by Ackroyd can exist without an understanding of theatre form. Using alternative terminology, Thompson and Schechner substantiate this point, stating that they deny neither the 'social aspects of aesthetic theatre nor the aesthetic aspects of social theatre but rather point out differences of purpose, audiences, venues and production values' (*Thompson & Schechner, 2004: 11*).

The move away from traditional theatre-building is another distinguishing 'family resemblance' shared by applied theatre programs. These are performed in nontheatrical settings, where audiences or participants often have no interest in theatre as an art form. Taylor highlights how the praxis of applied theatre pushes the boundaries of a performance away from the formality of mainstream theatre houses into a variety of 'vocational, community, and educational settings – parks, hospital wards, business training sites, police stations, conference venues' (*Taylor, 2003: 33*). Thompson and Schechner are quick to point out, however, that the view that applied theatre is simply a matter of taking theatre to sites that have no theatre or where theatre has been disrupted or destroyed needs to be challenged by 'the argument that social theatre is a complex process of interdisciplinary performance' (*Thompson & Schechner, 2004: 14*). According to them, these locations are often rich in performance moments, sometimes small and subtle and at other times huge and rich. Applied theatre 'rubs off against and reveals the performative in the setting, complementing or undermining it, challenging or further heightening it' (*Thompson & Schechner, 2004: 14*).

Another common denominator for applied theatre is a heavy concern with specific cultural contexts (*Rasmussen, 2000*). The level of participant involvement in the creation of a piece of applied theatre may vary, but common to all is the attention to specific cultural contexts and contextual criteria which guide the application of different

and context-specific competencies and processes in shaping the practice (*Rasmussen, 2000*). Applied theatre draws on theory pertaining to the locations where specific projects take place. For example, theatre in education has used educational theories to inform its work. Theatre for development has used development theory in the structuring of its methods. 'The act of applying theatre to the issue at hand means that the social theatre worker enters a practical and discursive space already full of psychological and/or sociological reference points' (*Thompson & Schechner, 2004:12*).

Finally, Rasmussen declares 'spontaneity' (*Rasmussen, 2000*) in the form of improvisation as included in the list of family resemblances, highlighting that he cannot think of any applied theatre approaches not relying on spontaneous processes to an important degree. Applied theatre denies both the concept and the practice of repetition and finished performances – the run, the production open for critical review (*Schininá, 2004: 28*) - moving instead to a situation where the performance is no longer something that has to be reproduced but is instead an experience of growth for the group. By orientating itself around improvisation, the applied theatre process allows for 'maximum use of available resources and adjustments to limitations' (*Brian, 2005: 3*) as the experiences and knowledge of those partaking in the process are drawn on in spontaneous improvisations around specific issues.

Thus the theatre-making process becomes a significant experience for all involved. Applied theatre views the theatre as an activity that can involve everyone and is not the prerogative of only the most talented and/or committed, who build up their technical capacities in the 'cloisters' of traditional theatre (*Schininá, 2004: 23*). Those partaking in the process are not simply actors, or mouthpieces for the vision of a playwright or director. Rather, they are all collaborators, bringing their unique visions and perspectives into the theatre-making forum. Fletcher, in his study of community-based theatre, draws on Antonio Gramsci's theories of the role of intellectuals in political movements in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, one of which posits that it is not in the actual revolution or strike that political efficacy is located. Rather it is in the times before, in the preparation for the final performance of revolution - in the rehearsal process - that intellectuals and workers do the long, hard work of empowerment and awareness

(*Fletcher, 2003: 196*). Fletcher uses this to highlight how potentially powerful the process of applied theatre creation, based largely on improvisation and spontaneity, can be. In its move away from emphasis on finished performance, applied theatre-making offers a positive process that encourages transformation in and of itself.

Taylor cites Boal's (1985) argument that at its most effective, theatre places audiences in significant reflective experiences (*Taylor, 2003: 3*). He thus coins the term 'participant observer' to denote those who participate in an applied theatre program. This refers to audience members who are having an experience of an event while (to varying degrees) controlling the nature of the experience that they are having. The dual stance of being willing to participate in the work and understanding the nature of the participation (*Taylor, 2003: 5*) leads to a dialogue between the real and fictional worlds, and the creation of a space where individuals can 'interrogate an issue, confront a problem and analyse their own relationship to the world in which they live' (*Taylor, 2003: 4*). Rather than simply talking or reading about whatever issue is at hand, participants experience it firsthand as they encounter and respond to fictional (often reality-based) characters and situations that encourage their engagement with the subject matter being dealt with. Kuftinec sums it up well when she reminds her readers that 'engaging an audience requires working *with* them rather than simply performing *for* them' (*Kuftinec, 1996: 92*).

This understanding of applied theatre audiences as active participants is compounded by the fact that the representations in applied theatre pieces often strike close to home for community audiences. Fletcher highlights how these audiences devote more scrutiny when watching a piece of applied theatre, 'probing every image, identity and speech to judge how closely the play does or does not match their perception of their community' (*Fletcher, 2003: 200*). This process activates them, causing them to experience Bundy's aforementioned 'animation, connection, and heightened awareness' (*Bundy, 2002*) which leads to aesthetic engagement, the possibility of a learning experience and the potential for consequent action.

Common to applied theatre projects is a commitment to community change. While it is just one tool for achieving community aims, applied theatre does offer a participatory

means of raising a community's level of consciousness. This enables members to freely and openly discuss important issues and generate dialogue in the community to help achieve personal and collective goals (Taylor, 2003: 37). As Taylor states, the aim of a piece of applied theatre should be to 'open up a conversation around a particular issue and challenge community members to use this theatre form as a way to further conversation' (Taylor, 2003: 37). An ideal model would see the applied theatre 'teaching artists' and participant observers joining together to share their knowledge and, as a result of this, increase their power. Taylor encourages moving away from the traditional dominant model where participants are satisfied with the advice of 'experts' (Taylor, 2003: 67). Teaching artists should not view themselves as 'experts', but rather as collaborators who will work together with stakeholders, realising that the creative work demands the input and control of all those involved with it (Taylor, 2003: 65). The process of collaboration inherent in applied theatre also has the positive outcome of leading to an increased sense of ownership as all involved contribute significantly to the creation of the piece of theatre.

Both Taylor and Ackroyd stress the importance of applied theatre practitioners remaining critical with regards to the 'morality' of the applied theatre project with which they are engaged. Taylor defines 'morality' as 'the underlying humane values informing the choices and the implementations of the programs that teaching artists and funding bodies make' (Taylor, 2003: 77). He stresses the need to ask 'Who is this project serving?' Ackroyd writes 'it is not enough to look at whether or not the theatre piece achieves its ends. We also need to look at whether or not those ends should be achieved' (Ackroyd, 2000).

*'My question is, therefore, if theatre has been applied to the job of opening minds to new perspectives, to increasing self esteem, to bringing together disparate communities, why should it not be used to produce restricted perspectives implying criticism of others, to reduce self esteem and confidence with ideas, to divide and fragment established communities?'*

*(Ackroyd, 2000)*

Zakes Mda (1993), in *When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre* describes the process of ‘intervention’ as the essential variable that must operate within any process of participation in order to achieve conscientisation (Mda, 1993: 165), which is deemed a critical precursor for action by Freire (Freire, 1972: 45). He posits that intervention occurs during the dramatisation process when those who are facilitating the process, or ‘catalysts’, interrupt the proceedings to contribute their views, or to guide the participants. Interventions are thus crucial in the attempt to ensure that the participants are able to probe deeply into the issues being dealt with. However, Mda warns practitioners of the need to create a balanced situation that will result in ‘optimal intervention’ (Mda, 1993: 173). This is achieved, he argues, when ‘intervention is sufficient to serve three functions – naming, reflection, action – and does not go to the extent of imposing the catalyst’s own views and values on the process of dramatisation’ (Mda, 1993: 173). Teaching artists need to be critically aware of their interventions in order to ensure that participants are able to engage with the material autonomously, and without the imposition of other people’s opinions and belief systems.

Mda warns that catalysts with little critical awareness may ‘move’ participants into a false interpretation of the issues involved in the applied theatre. He gives the example of the Maratholi Traveling Theatre’s *Kopano ke Matla!* (1984), a play designed to encourage the establishment of co-operatives amongst the villagers. The director of this play, Mda recounts, made a conscious effort to avoid a discussion of any political issues within the narrative, wanting to prevent the play from becoming a ‘political forum’ (Mda, 1993: 175). To this end, the rural poverty portrayed in the play was blamed on the laziness of the villagers, with the structural and social causes remaining concealed from the audience. The villagers were expected to accept unquestioningly the situation as presented by the theatre group, which resulted in many issues pertinent to the subject of the play never being discussed (Mda, 1993: 175).

Ackroyd probes whether it is legitimate for drama to be used to further the ends that sponsors support – for example, promoting tobacco companies (Ackroyd, 2000), whose products are known to be detrimental to physical health. In the face of all these complex

questions, it is clear that in order to remain a useful, positively powerful form, the work done in applied theatre needs to be accompanied by strong reflective practices that allow both teaching artists and participant observers to step out of the world created by the theatre in order to maintain a critical perspective of what is being achieved. As Ackroyd states, ‘applied theatre is a mighty form and, like fire, can work for us or against us’ (Ackroyd, 2000).

#### 1.4. The Relationship Between Community Building Practice and Applied Theatre

In her study of a community-based outdoor parade that travels through the city of Galway each summer, Christie Fox quotes Peter Brook’s statement that the purpose of theatre is to bring a group of fragments together to create a community:

*‘The purpose of theatre is[...] making an event in which a group of fragments are suddenly brought together [...] in a community which, by the natural laws that make every community, gradually breaks up.[...] At certain moments this fragmented world comes together and for a certain time it can rediscover the marvel of organic life. The marvel of being one.’*

*(Brook in Fox, 2003: 29)*

Certainly, the production of any kind of theatre brings people together for a specific time to work collectively in order to achieve a goal – performance. Lorenzo Garcia recounts how, in a university production of the script-based *Bocon!* in Texas, a strong sense of community was forged between the student-actors as they rehearsed and ‘lived through’ (Garcia, 1998: 155) the play production. According to him, many theatre artists attempt to integrate into the theatre-making process production elements that define a sense of common ground, including ‘the establishment of common purpose, shared values, mutual respect, joint responsibility, prolonged involvement and clearly delineated expectations’ (Garcia, 1998: 156-157). With often intense periods of rehearsals, where cast members and production staff grow together as they are bound by

joint experiences, there often emerges a tight-knit group ethos between those partaking in the process of theatre production. This is a form of community building.

Celebrated theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, however, argues that traditional theatre always serves to oppress people since it ‘supports ways of thinking that alienate, immobilise and mute those not directly attached to lines of power’ (*Howard, 2004: 221*). He believes that there is a separation between those who can speak (the director and playwright, who use performers as their vessels) and those who remain passive (the audience). This draws to mind Freire’s theory of banking education, where teachers simply ‘deposit’ knowledge into the minds of their students, who passively accept what is being passed on to them without any two-way flow of information. Similarly, in Boal’s conception of oppressive theatre, the audience are simply receptacles for the representations and ideologies that those controlling the medium choose to portray on stage (*Boal, 1985: 47*).

Clearly, true community, which encompasses Selznick’s (1992) elements of historicity, identity, mutuality, plurality, participation and integration (*Selznick cit. Walter, 2002: 73*) cannot be built upon a foundation that is intrinsically alienating and undemocratic. If one of the intended outcomes of a theatrical undertaking is to create a community, a form of theatre should be located that moves away from these binary divisions between director/producer/playwright and actor, and actor and audience. Boal famously called for a reconceptualisation of theatre from an art form where people ‘feel and react’ to one which encourages them to ‘think and analyse’ (*Howard, 2004: 222*). His ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ techniques (which draw on Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ as a theoretical base) serve to activate ‘spect-actors’ – participants in his processes are simultaneously spectators and actors – in order to make them realise that if they want to make change, they must engage with their problems and find solutions rather than hope that someone else will determine and enforce resolution. By breaking the dichotomy between audience and actor so that everyone has the space to ‘reclaim the role of protagonist in their own lives, albeit momentarily’ (*Green, 2001: 53*), Boal believes that ‘perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution’ (*Boal, 1979: 122*), and envisages the theatre as a place where the ‘spect-



actor' can train himself for action, can try out solutions and possible actions. Taking Bertolt Brecht's ideas of theatre as tool for creating critical consciousness and the desire for effecting social action further (*Brockett, 1996: 196-197*), Boal's work makes social action an actual part of the theatrical experience.

While Boal's work was pioneering at the time of its conception and still serves to inspire many theatre-groups the world over who use theatre as a means to achieve social empowerment, his techniques have come up against a fair amount of criticism in the past. David Davis and Carmel O'Sullivan, in their article *Boal and the Shifting Sands: the Un-Political Master Swimmer*, explain that Boal initially aligned himself to the Marxist understanding that 'objective reality exists and has its own independent existence no matter how many minds are deciding what it is' (*Davis & O'Sullivan, 2000: 292*). Over time, however, his theatrical techniques moved his work onto the ideological plains of idealist philosophers like Kant and Hegel, who believed that 'social thought determines social being' (*Davis & O'Sullivan, 2000: 290*); that all people had to do to become free was to think themselves free (*O'Sullivan, 2001: 89*). Boal's work, the authors argue, accepts the individual's version of reality as legitimate. No matter how far removed it is from objective reality, the power to think up an idea and try it out is a ruling principle of Boal's work. Yet, in doing so, the social forces at work are not interrogated. The authors suggest that the 'feeling of being changed/being free' (*Davis & O'Sullivan 2000: 293*) that comes from partaking in Theatre of the Oppressed methodologies is not enough to transform an entire society. With Freire's understanding of the concept of empowerment being a 'social class empowerment', the necessity exists for something much more than an individual or psychological event to occur in order to truly change the world. In Boal's work, much of the focus is on the protagonist and the realisation of his/her individual wants/needs/desires in isolation from his/her social and material objective reality. According to the authors, this 'individualism stands in the way of a movement for critical social empowerment' (*Davis & O'Sullivan, 2000: 293*).

Thus, in order to have the potential to create true transformation, a theatre needs, in Freirean terms, to alter the very structure (*Freire, 1972: 48*) of society. At the same

time, it should distance itself from sole focus on the individual to a more holistically considered view of how the objective reality of the world affects the contexts in which we find ourselves. Applied theatre may be successful in doing this because it provides methodologies for many of the principles inherent in community building practice. For example:

**Community is reconceptualised as a multidimensional system that includes both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of community.**

In *The 'common green/common ground' Performance Project: The Personal, the Political, the Gardens, and NYU*, Cindy Rosenthal documents the tensions between the creative partners in the creation of a community-based theatre performance which aimed to tell the story of New York's community gardeners and raise awareness about urban open space and garden preservation issues. She describes the conflicting and overlapping desires and expectations of the project's creative partners, explaining that tensions between the student performers/facilitators, the garden community activists and the 'outsider' theatre facilitator 'often pulled in three directions at once' (Rosenthal, 2002: 152). She asserts her belief that:

*'Precisely because of the people involved, each with his/her piece in the whole story, the community-based performance process is always complex and can become fraught with tension as traditional ideas about authority, control and the roles individuals play in the development process are reconfigured.'*

*(Rosenthal, 2002: 142)*

It is clear to Rosenthal that although the production did not effect policy change nor save a garden, one clear accomplishment of the project, however, was community building (Rosenthal, 2002, 160), with connections forged between people of different ages and ethnicities from across the city. NYU students and faculty and community gardeners and activists from all five Boroughs collaborated throughout the process, leading to strengthened ties among the various groups. By creating links between the different players involved in the community garden movement, Rosenthal notes that in

the views of the project partners 'the citywide movement to preserve gardens and green, open spaces seemed stronger and tighter as a result of the community building performance' (*Rosenthal, 2002: 137*).

The community that comes together over the creation of a piece of applied theatre is one in which open communication between the various parties is encouraged and stimulated. Typically, NYU students and staff and community gardeners and activists would approach the issue of community gardens from different standpoints, varying from more academic means of protests, for example journal papers or quantitative studies to staged marches on city hall. Bringing the different dimensions into one dynamic system allows communication of goals, strategies and ideologies to occur so that the action that is taken – in this case, the creation of the piece – is infused with the greatest number of influences, and is thus as rich as possible.

An applied theatre initiative in Busoga, Uganda to control tsetse flies, the main cause of sleeping sickness in the region, illustrates this point effectively. Through the theatre-making process, it created a community that included villagers, community-based organisations, the Ugandan system of Primary Health Care (PHC), local civic leaders and scientists (*Okoth, 1998: 127*). Each of these constituents contributed something different, yet vital, to the project. While the villagers, many of whom belonged to local, community-based organisations produced short songs and a rough story for the play, the team of scientists checked these for accuracy. PHC personnel offered support for the program, and local civic leaders contributed money towards the efforts (*Okoth, 1998: 128*). The involvement of these different dimensions allowed the program to be effective and sustainable. Because it was created by the villagers, the play was relevant to the experiences of its audience, and the infrastructure provided by the PHC, community-based organisations and local civic leaders ensured that the process did not simply peter out after a few performances. The authors explain how the final script of the play and the sleeping-sickness song went on to be used by community-based organisations and schools (*Okoth, 1998: 128*).

Of course, this process is not without its tensions – as Rosenthal asserts, the many voices that come together in an applied theatre project may not always sing in harmony. But it is this very quality that practitioners involved in applied theatre quote as its greatest capacity. Guglielmo Schininá (2004) believes that the value of theatre does not lie in its capacity to emphasise what unifies human beings, but rather its potential to emphasise their differences and to create bridges between them. He writes:

*'If we concentrate on the unifying factors, we create elites who do not act in history; we position them as somehow existing "above" or removed from the social and relational dynamics of identity formation. If we work on the differences among and within all people, we might be able to turn conflicts into peaceful contrasts and exchanges – into ways of relating.'*

*(Schininá, 2004: 18)*

Cohen writes about the *communitas*, or the sense of community, which refers to the ephemeral sense of connectedness and bonding experienced by a group through the common experience of a unifying ritual. He points out that this sense may operate only symbolically to unite a group of people whose values, beliefs, and backgrounds do not cohere – that *communitas* may reinforce commonality and conceal difference (*Cohen in Kuftinec, 1994: 94*). While it is true that *communitas* may manifest a momentary feeling of community identity, the act of ignoring differences and simply drawing on commonalities of experience or identity constitutes the development of a symbolic – not a real – community. By providing a space for complexities and tensions, the goal of the applied theatre process is to 'empower differences and create solidarity, not to purify and normalise them' (*Schininá, 2004: 24*). In *How Do You Make Social Change?* Carol Atlas writes that in her 'deepest vision for art and progressive social change, cultural and political hierarchies are turned on their side and replaced by participatory cultural and social movements' (*Atlas in Misc., 2001: 76*). By practically carrying out community building practice's reconceptualisation of community, with funders, artists, community organisations and outside stakeholders coming together in a space where their differences are respected and solidarity is built, applied theatre may prove to be the vehicle to animate Atlas's vision.

### **Community building practice recognises community resources.**

Community building practice is grounded in the belief that there lies within the community a bank of enormous resources in the form of skills, knowledge, relationships and inherent social infrastructure. In a shift from more conventional forms of community development, these resources are drawn on in the community building process. As opposed to needs-based policies and programs, which view communities as problems that need to be solved, community building practice is more capacity oriented, focusing instead on how existing resources can be better harnessed to contribute to local development initiatives.

An applied theatre project encompasses this quality by utilising members of the community in all spheres of its creation. In her description of the Galway Arts Festival Parade, Fox describes how ‘people who are not normally highly valued members of the economy come center stage during theatrical parades and display their expertise to the larger community’ (Fox, 2003: 31). Similarly, Sara Brady describes how, in the production of *Steelbound*, a community-based adaptation of the Prometheus myth, steel workers who had recently lost their jobs to retrenchment became actors and devisors in the play (Brady, 2000). These unemployed individuals became essential to the creation of the play because the insider-knowledge that they held about the nature of working for Bethlehem Steel was incorporated into the piece of theatre. Similarly, the trade union movement in South Africa during apartheid led to the conception of ‘workers’ theatre’, famous examples of which include *The sun will also rise for the workers* and *The Dunlop Play*. In 1980, during a strike at a foundry on the East Rand, a lawyer called in to help defend some of the arrested strikers conceived a role-play situation to try to reconstruct events. This experiment evolved, with the help of a member of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, into a production entitled *Ilanga Lizophumela Abasenzi* (*The sun also rises for the workers*) ([http://www.southafrica.info/ess\\_info/sa\\_glance/culture/926391.htm](http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/culture/926391.htm)). The production was performed both to workers in factories and to a wider audience at the University of the Witwatersrand. As with *Steelbound*, in this kind of theatre the workers’ experiences and opinions were valued and crucial to the

performance. In *The Antigone Project*, a piece of applied theatre dealing with the violence and ongoing trauma of war, a local veterans' group were interviewed and consulted during the devising process – their recollections, beliefs and understandings incorporated into the performance piece and video footage of their interviews displayed (Brian, 2005: 8).

Applied theatre projects also draw on community resources in other ways. Staging rehearsals in certain buildings may revitalise an under-utilised space. Buying snacks from the lady on the corner between sessions will contribute capital to a local initiative. Local handymen may be able to create props for the performance. Drawing on local resources not only contributes to the applied theatre project but also to the community itself as a conceptual shift takes place. Instead of seeing themselves as needy recipients of outside aid, communities come to realise the potential that they themselves hold in the re-imagining of their own futures.

This calls to mind the work done by the Magnet Theatre company in conjunction with members of the University of Cape Town's Fine Art and Drama Departments in Clanwilliam. This small town, situated at the foot of the Cederberg mountain range around 230 kilometres from Cape Town, is one of the best areas for ancient San rock art in the world, with over 2500 discovered sites (<http://www.clanwilliam.info/info/inforockart.htm>). While fine art workshops had been run with the Clanwilliam children for many years, it was not until 2001 that a performance element was added in the form of dance and story-telling workshops. Since then, hundreds of children participate in the project annually, making paintings and objects, attending the workshops and forming part of the final procession and performance.

The Clanwilliam Art and Performance Project is a contribution to the University of Cape Town's Living Landscape Project, which is a vehicle initiated to reinvest in the community of Clanwilliam some of the insights gained through 'years of archaeological, geological and historical research in the region' (Skotnes & Fleishman, 2002: 19). Each year, the project is organised around a different ancient San myth, with the workshops providing a space for the children to find creative ways to interpret the

stories. In 2005, the myth of ‘The Mantis and the Elephant’ was chosen as the ‘backbone’ (Espi-Sanchez *et al.*, 2005) of the week-long project. The story, which highlights the importance of caring for the young, was conveyed repeatedly over the week – either through conventional storytelling or improvisations and role-plays in which the youths could participate.

The project culminates each year in a procession and performance. Skotnes and Fleishman describe how:

*‘As it darkens and the procession weaves through the streets it becomes a magical display of glowing lights hovering almost disembodied against the black mountains and the deep violet sky. Hundreds of people come pouring out of the little houses and join the parade until they reach the wood mill where dancers make fire drawings from sawdust and actors tell stories.’*

*(Skotnes & Fleishman, 2002: 4)*

By drawing on the San heritage as a resource for creative inspiration, the project not only provides a stimulus for the community to learn new skills and be a part of a performance, but also creates a connection between the past, the present and the future. In doing so, a framework is created for ‘integrating the learning process and for reconnecting people with a past from which colonialism and apartheid have largely severed them... creating a sense of local ownership over this heritage landscape’ (<http://www.clp.uct.ac.za/objectives/CLLP.htm>). Those who participate in the project draw not only on the physical resources of the land, but also on the cultural, and historical heritage that it carries.

### **Development is ‘of and by’ the community.**

Following on from this, reconceptualising community as a multidimensional system with a trove of resources available which can be utilised in development initiatives, community building practice becomes ‘of and by’ the community as opposed to ‘for’ the community by an outside expert. While the argument may be made that an applied

theatre practitioner may hail from beyond the geographical community in which an initiative is taking place, the 'dynamic system' that develops over the course of the project is, ostensibly, a new community of which he/she is an integral part, along with all others involved in the project.

Of course, there are certain qualities that the applied theatre practitioner must embody in order to avoid taking over control of the project and dictating its direction. Taylor uses Cecily O'Neill's image of the effective practitioner as one who is able to lead the way while walking backward.

*'She argues that leaders need to act as guides who should know where the travellers have come from, and the nature of the journey so far, so that they can help shape the kind of journey that lies ahead. Rather than leading with their backs to the participants, leaders face them while moving forward, conscious of where the group is at and what they are capable of achieving.'*

*(Taylor, 2003: 60)*

Applied theatre practitioners must share their knowledge and skills with participants and also be prepared to learn from them. They should constantly challenge the traditional dominant model of development, in which participants believe that they only need comply with the advice of their leaders for all to be well (*Taylor, 2003: 65*). This is directly in line with Freire's call for a breakdown between teachers and students; by breaking down the traditionally binary relationship between audience and director/writer, applied theatre provides a structure in which those who are rendered passive in traditional theatre are able to take developmental action 'of and by' themselves. The power analysis in community building practice stresses 'power with' and 'power to' as opposed to the more traditional and hierarchical notions of 'power over' (*Minkler, 2002: 8*).

Describing the work of Cornerstone Theater Company, a multi-ethnic, ensemble-based theatre company based in Los Angeles that devises work with community collaborators, dramaturg John Fletcher reports on a piece of applied theatre called *Growing Home*



(2001), about the issue of urban development projects' encroachment on agricultural land in and around the city. At one stage, Hmong participants in the project's development raised concerns over how their culture was being represented (*Fletcher, 2003: 199*). The term 'Hmong' refers to the ethnic identity of many of the Laotian refugees who fled to the United States after the Vietnam War. A subset of the category 'Asian-Americans', Hmong-Americans experience high rates of unequal educational opportunities in comparison to general American statistics, and forty percent live below the poverty level ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hmong\\_American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hmong_American)). After a group debate during rehearsals as to how these difficulties of cultural representation may be resolved, the scene was completely re-written within a week. Fletcher highlights how, in situations such as this, applied theatre provides more than just an opportunity for people to 'see themselves' or even to be on stage themselves – what he terms 'representational opportunity' (*Fletcher, 2003: 199*). Rather, applied theatre offers participants such as the Hmong in *Growing Home* the chance to actually take responsibility for how and why they participate in the performance, which he refers to as 'representational agency' (*Fletcher, 2003: 200*). Thus, applied theatre offers an opportunity for true participation such as that encouraged by community building practice, shying away from the token representation that certain development initiatives imply.

### **Community is seen as dynamic and liable to change continuously.**

Community building practice sees community as dynamic and emergent – a system that is constantly changing according to the differing parameters and relationships taking shape through the actions and interactions of people and organisations (*Walter, 2002: 71*). Because of the nature of an applied theatre project, which veers away from traditional theatre's focus on a finished product that can be performed again and again, it lends itself to the creation of a community around the contextual specificities of the differing arenas in which the project may occur. As Schininá asserts, the aim of applied theatre 'is not the aesthetic result, but the process of building relationships through creative communication' (*Schininá, 2004: 24*). As this process will be radically diverse in each of the contexts in which an applied theatre project occurs, one can be sure that the dimensions and elements of the community that is created during the process will be

different from those that have already been created in the past or will go on to be constructed in the future.

This quality is captured by Banning (2002) in her article *Footprints on the Shore: Documenting Site-Specific Community Performance* in which she articulates the difficulty faced when trying to document theatrical performance. This difficulty is amplified, she argues, when performances are site-specific, and when they are developed by a community group over a period of months for a single celebratory performance, such as the Freedom Project, performed on Robben Island on April 27, 2001 (Banning, 2002: 137). Banning explains that while she collected much material over the course of the performance and the three-month process leading up to it, she is still forced to ask:

*'What am I to do with them? And, more to the point, what are you expected (expecting) to do with them? It is these related and relational questions that seem to me to beat at the heart of all attempts to document so ephemeral a thing as a one-performance-only, site-specific community performance.'*

*(Banning, 2002: 141)*

By illustrating a firm determination not to succumb to documentation's 'often hidden power... to claim its own authoritative narrative' (Banning, 2002: 137), Banning illustrates that applied theatre is not a rigid, stagnant form. It is complex and dynamic, incorporating a number of different viewpoints and voices. This makes it an ideal form to house an initiative that draws on community building practice's reconceptualisation of community. The flexibility of its boundaries mean that applied theatre can incorporate within its processes the myriad of different possibilities that a multidimensional community may contribute to a development initiative.

Applied theatre is a model that can be used in an almost innumerable amount of different situations and contexts. From a township in rural South Africa to college students in America, the structures and benefits of the form are widely utilised by theatre and social development practitioners all over the world. Perhaps the most

powerful quality of applied theatre is that while certain principles are inherent to the usefulness of the form, such as participation, improvisation and transformation, there are no stringent rules governing its practice. There is no text-book outlining how many people to involve in its practice or what techniques to carry out at given times of the process. Rather, the form is malleable enough to encompass a wide variety of contributions and inputs. Because, as stated above, applied theatre works with differences as opposed to attempting to 'iron these out', there is space for a diversity of voices to air their views, beliefs and understandings. Thus, it provides an effective framework for community building practice's dynamic conception of community because of its ability to support shifting, changing influences.

### **1.5. Literature Review: A Summation**

From a review of the available literature, it is clear that applied theatre provides a practical, established form (with attendant methodologies and strategies) for setting into motion initiatives that promote community building practice. This is especially useful to two sets of people – applied theatre practitioners who are accustomed to using the form to create issue-based theatre and social development practitioners wishing to locate methodologies to implement community building practice principles.

Being conscious of the community building that is occurring may allow seasoned applied theatre practitioners to model greater complexity into their work. Walter (2002) asserts that perceiving and working with the actual complexity that exists in the reconceptualising of community implied by community building practice allows practitioners to take more information and relationships into account when orienting in practice. This provides them with many possible levels and areas with which to engage and in which to work (*Walter, 2002: 74*). More influences may be drawn into the applied theatre project that may be able to impact positively on its content and form. Also, the reach of the project may be extended so that increased efficacy, with as great a number of participants as possible, can be achieved.

The potential that applied theatre holds for social development has been well documented in the literature. The theatre form offers an innovative technique for community development precisely because it encompasses community building principles. It encourages development 'with' and 'by' the community as opposed to by an outside expert, it is flexible enough to support the changing, dynamic nature of community and it can be carried out in varying contexts. By being inherently capacity-based and empowering, using 'true' participation in the creation of agency, applied theatre presents social development practitioners with a means, not only to target specific issues effectively, but to stimulate positive community development. Unearthing the link between applied theatre and community building practice provides social development agents and organisations with an extremely powerful, effective set of strategies for achieving their aims.

This literature review has provided an overview of the key focus areas of this study – community building practice and applied theatre - as well as insight into their relationship as gleaned from relevant literary sources. Theoretical texts as well as descriptive analyses of applied theatre programs from all over the world have been used to solidify my previously intuitive sense that applied theatre projects are underpinned by community building practice principles. The next chapter builds on this understanding with reference to the TPG project, providing an overview of the context of the project and articulating the theoretical framework around which this study is shaped.

## CHAPTER 2

### Contextual Framework

My literature review into the areas of applied theatre and community building practice has led to the development of a theory regarding the nature of the relationship between the two fields. Drawing from a number of examples of applied theatre projects that have been done in the past, both in South Africa and abroad, it seems clear that a strong community building practice framework underlies applied theatre projects. It is my argument that during an applied theatre undertaking, a multidimensional, dynamic community is formed by those who come together to create the piece of theatre. This is a reconceptualisation of the traditional view of community, which generally refers to a geographical location or a number of people bound together because of a shared element of their identities – for example, their sexual orientations, religions or interests. In its embracing of the Freire-imbued principles of community building practice, it is my belief that applied theatre locates itself as a potentially powerful vehicle for community development.

This theory provides a conceptual framework for analysing the TPG project. Adopting the supposition that a new kind of community is formed over the course of an applied theatre project provides a central process around which to base analysis. If we accept that those involved in the TPG project formed a dynamic, multidimensional community, many questions arise which need to be explored. How this community came together, how and why applied theatre contributed to the process and the implications of this are all pertinent issues that entreat one to delve deeply into the evidence at hand in order to develop a solid processual understanding of the work.

#### 2.1. Contextual Overview

On 10 May, 2004, my Masters supervisor, Assoc. Professor Gay Morris received an e-mail from Dr. Angela Van Koersfeld from the medical clinic in Delft, a major township community 35 kilometres outside of Cape Town. With around 150 000 inhabitants, and

high poverty and crime rates ([http://www.h-o-p-e.net/e\\_people.htm](http://www.h-o-p-e.net/e_people.htm)), Delft has been described as an ‘apartheid dumping ground’ (<http://www.case.edu/pubs/cwrumag/summer2004/downloads/CaseWorld.pdf>), since during apartheid Blacks and Coloureds were forcibly relocated to this community. Dr. Van Koersfeld explained how the Delft clinic, which is one of eight clinics in the Western Cape run under the auspices of the South African Clothing Industry Health Care Fund, provides Primary Health Care to clothing industry workers and their dependants. Every year, each clinic is provided with a budget from the Fund to spend on an outreach project within its community. In 2004, the e-mail explained, the Delft clinic had chosen ‘Teenage Pregnancies’ as their theme for the year. They were hoping to bring their message to the youth in the area through a drama production, talks, videos, workshops and pamphlets. She described how:

*‘The message we are wanting to give is that abstinence from sexual activity is best until one is ready (emotionally, economically, physically, etc.). A monogamous relationship with a partner who is healthy is safe, from the point of sexually transmitted diseases, but contraception is important to plan a family. We would like to look at values, ‘norms’ and cultural and religious attitudes towards sexuality and sexual activity.’*

*Van Koersfeld 2004, personal correspondence*

As the co-ordinator of UCT’s MA in Applied Drama and Theatre Studies, Prof. Morris identified this as an opportunity for me to fulfil the fieldwork component of my course, and therefore arranged for me to work on the project in a facilitatory capacity. Thus began a project that was to span four months of planning, conceptualising, rehearsing and performance. At an initial meeting between myself, Prof. Morris and the Delft clinic team that consisted of all the professional and administrative staff of the clinic who jointly took responsibility for the clinic’s outreach project, a plan of action was drawn up for the coming months. This was followed by a sumptuous tea spread – a small taste of the gastronomic delights that would follow in the next months. Excellent food provided by the clinic staff was to become a fixture of all meetings between the clinic and the TPG, providing a crucial bridge to repair misunderstandings at various stages of the project and softening the TPG to the demands of the clinic staff.

The following week, Lawona Jason and Erica Kessie, two Peer-Group Educators from the Fund who were to be part of the cast of the teenage pregnancy play, and I visited three schools in Delft to interview Grade 7 (our target audience, consisting of youths between the ages of 12 and 14) learners around issues of family, parenthood, fashions, future hopes and dreams and boy-girl relationships. It was hoped that the information that we got from the learners could be included in the play that we created so that it would be as relevant as possible to their experiences. This would make the learners more likely to engage with what they saw before them. A week later, two audition workshops were held in Delft to determine who else would comprise the cast of the TPG play. The next week, we began the theatre-making process with three exploratory workshops at the Clothing Union's premises in Salt River aimed at stimulating our understanding of teenage pregnancy and delving more deeply into the issues that surround it. University and school vacations caused a brief lapse in activity, and it was two weeks before we moved on to the next stage of the process – the actual development of the narrative that was to form the basis of the play that we envisaged touring to schools in Delft and Belhar. Although we had only scheduled two weeks of rehearsals before beginning performances, this was lengthened by a week as we tried to create a product that satisfied all parties involved – the clinic staff, representatives from the Fund, Prof. Morris, myself and the actors. The program visited schools in Delft and Belhar for the planned two weeks. Due to the perceived success of the program, it was decided that the TPG should also perform in Atlantis. We thus spent three days in Atlantis, performing our play for three additional local schools.

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

It is my contention that during the process that underlay the TPG project, the core principles of community building practice were set into motion. Rather than conceptualising Prof. Morris and myself as outsiders brought into Delft to supervise the creation of a play about teenage pregnancy, I understand the process in the way suggested by Walter (2002). In these early stages, a community was formed consisting

of the clinic staff, staff from the Clothing Industry Health Care Fund, the actors, the learners whom we had interviewed, Prof. Morris and myself. Although we all had different skills and abilities to contribute to the project, the central event of the teenage pregnancy play brought us together, pooling our resources for a common goal. With our commitment to the project, we had become a part of the TPG community. At no stage were the boundaries of this community static. For example, two of the auditioners who were not chosen to become a part of the cast, had participated for two days and, as such, had been a part of the community for that time. Likewise, when Lawona, Erica and I interviewed the learners in schools, they had become a part of the community for a time.

This dynamic community was also certainly multidimensional, consisting of clinic doctors, university academics, nurses, community workers, school principals and teachers as well as schoolchildren. The unemployed youths who formed the cast of the teenage pregnancy play were also inextricable parts of the TPG community. As well as Erica and Lawona, who expressed willingness to actively participate in the initiative at the first meeting with the clinic, the cast consisted of Delft residents Chantal McKeet (18), Graeme Josias (23), Fawziyah Arendse (23) and Shawn Petersen (20) (hereafter I shall refer to the cast of the TPG play by first names only). The first three actors had heard about the program through the clinic's attempts to spread the word about the project amongst the Clothing Industry community in Delft. Shawn had been sitting on the porch of his house when the bakkie transporting the other participants to the workshop had driven past. Spotting him, the driver had pulled up next to the house and asked whether he would like to come along. With no idea of what he was getting himself into, Shawn jumped up onto the bakkie and accompanied the others to the audition workshop. The idea behind using unemployed youths from Delft in the project had been to 'flush out some of the youth who are at home doing nothing and interested in committing to the project' (*Van Koersveld, 2004*). This served a dual purpose. Participating in the project would be empowering to the youths themselves as they learnt new skills and then had the opportunity to direct this new learning back into their community. Meanwhile, the learners in the schools would be able to relate to the cast, making them more likely to engage with the message that was being presented to them



in the play. Since Lawona, Fawziyah and Graeme had all been teen parents, their experiences provided a wealth of resources for us to draw on in the creation of the play.

The community, comprising the clinic staff, representatives from the South African Clothing Industry Health Care Fund, the actors, the learners, Prof. Morris and myself, gathered together around the central goal of creating a play about teenage pregnancy. However, it is my understanding that it was through processes of negotiation and locating ourselves within the project that a sense of ‘community-ness’ (*Selznick cit. Walter, 2002: 73*) became evident. Through the e-mail correspondence, planning meetings, workshops and rehearsals, each constituency of the community was able to make goals clear and begin to understand what everybody else was hoping to gain from the experience. As a single multidimensional, dynamic community, the greater good of the initiative that we had formed around remained at the centre of all of our efforts.

This hearkens back to Cohen’s (1985) concept of *communitas*, which, as described earlier, is the ephemeral sense of connectedness and bonding experienced by a group through common experience (*Cohen, 1985: 55*). Cohen explains how *communitas* strips away all of the social impedimenta that would otherwise divide and distinguish people, reinforcing commonalities and concealing differences. His assertion is that this constitutes the development of symbolic – not real – community. While my description of the way that the TPG community came together may teeter on the brink of sounding like *communitas*, in that I have perhaps represented the community building process as holistic and smooth-running, I wish to clarify that it was not without its complexities. Often, the different community constituents had divergent priorities regarding the program, and this sometimes led to tensions.

This was very evident in the relationship between the cast, Prof. Morris and me, and the Delft clinic. From the start, it was clear that the clinic staff placed much emphasis on their functioning as a team. It was evident that the doctors, nurses, dentists and secretaries all consulted together on a regular basis and that important decisions were made as a group. While both the clinic team and those of us actually involved in fleshing out the narrative of the play wanted to create a successful piece of theatre that

was of good quality, our visions diverged at certain key points. For example, when the play had been in rehearsal for a week, I received a phone call from one of the doctors expressing concern over the kind of language that would be used in the program. She explained that the team were worried that including too much slang would encourage a lifestyle where sex and drugs are permissible, since they had recently attended a talk by a recovering Tik addict who had told them that in order to change their habits they have to change their whole lifestyle. My immediate response was that the program had to be grounded in a certain level of reality – in order for the characters to be believable, they would have to talk like Grade 7 learners in Delft, with a certain level of slang included in the speech. I consulted with the actors and although they understood the clinic's concerns, they also felt strongly about portraying local realities in the play. Thus we attempted to find a compromise in the dialogue that we developed. We retained some local slang, but were careful to omit any words that could be construed as offensive. The clinic team was satisfied with the eventual piece of theatre. It is my understanding that it was through the process of negotiating solutions to such tensions that the TPG community was built.

A week and a half into rehearsals, we performed the play at a school in Delft as a pilot performance. While the cast and I realised that the program was not in its finished form, with the participatory sections still needing development, we were interested in getting a sense of the reactions from the learners and needed an opportunity to show the clinic what we had created. In this first version of the play, the female protagonist fell pregnant, and one of the characters, a teacher, was HIV positive. The group of actors and I had formulated this narrative as a way to show that although teenage pregnancy and STDs have negative effects, it is possible to continue living life at a certain level of normalcy. The clinic team did not agree that this should be our focus. From the start, they had been adamant that the play should contrast 'good' behaviour with 'bad' behaviour, and carry a moralistic lesson. The actors and I were determined not to create a play that preached at the learners. After the pilot performance, the start of the tours to schools was delayed so that we could re-work the narrative into one that was more mutually satisfactory.

Another example of a glaring difference in ideologies also occurred during this pilot performance. In the interactive session at the end of the play, when each actor reflected on the performance with a group of learners, one of the clinic staff-members approached a group. She took over the process entirely, drawing focus away from the actor at the helm of the group and leading the discussion herself. She asked the learners a general question about safe sex, and one of them responded that the correct thing for them to do would be to carry condoms with them at all times. The lady from the clinic grew angry and reproached this learner, shaking her finger and telling him that carrying condoms around was an invitation for sex. I realise that this debate is fundamental to the often contentious issue of sexual education but the actors and I were shocked to hear learners actually being instructed NOT to carry condoms. Following the performance, we took the issue up with the clinic staff, who were made to see our point of view. Eventually, we found a compromise, which went on to be included in the rap that the actors sang: *'Use a condom now, my friend, or rather just abstain!'*

We performed the re-worked version of the play to the clinic staff one afternoon in the waiting-room of the Delft clinic. The narrative of the play centred around 15-year-old Zoe, who works hard at school and has dreams of becoming a doctor. Her mother works long hours in a factory in order to earn money to support her and her older gangster brother, who has dropped out of school and does not work. Zoe's older, worldlier best friend Janine introduces her to Shawn, a handsome, soccer-playing boy from school who goes on to become Zoe's boyfriend. The narrative follows the couple's relationship as they decide whether or not to have sex (see Appendix). Approving of the changes that we had made, the play was deemed acceptable by the participants and clinic, and school-visits were scheduled for the following week. In all, the program toured to nine schools in Delft, Belhar and Atlantis, often running twice a day in order to accommodate the volume of learners at the schools. Each performance spanned one and a half hours and played to audiences of between 100 and 150 learners. Although the clinic had hoped to reach as many learners as possible, they came to understand that in order for the participatory segments of the program to be effective, there had to be a limited number of learners in each group. Especially when dealing with the subject of sex, which requires tact, sensitivity, and the building of trust, the actor/facilitators had to

really engage with their group-members, which would be impossible with too many learners.

With hindsight, it seems that it was due to the fact that the clinic staff functioned so strongly as a team that the actors, Prof. Morris and I were able to negotiate certain issues with them. Already accustomed to conferring amongst one another before making decisions, the clinic structure was far more open to incorporating our needs and the concerns that we felt strongly about than if we had been dealing with an individual who was set in his/her ways. While the clinic's ingrained ethos of teamwork could have alienated us by making us feel like outsiders, it actually served to support the process of community building that took place since it provided space for communication, concession and finding the middle ground on important issues. Although those of us creating the play never became a part of the tight-knit clinic team, we managed to operate together successfully. According to Walter's (2002) conceptualisation of community, we were all a part of the same multidimensional community.

### **2.3. Implications on Practice**

While it does not cancel out the complexities regarding power relations in the group caused by differences in age, gender, race or level of education, understanding us all as a community allows each person to be valued for what they have to contribute to the process. The development thus becomes asset-based. McKnight and Kretzmann (2002) describe how most people think of lower-income urban neighbourhoods as problems, noted for their deficiencies and needs (*McKnight & Kretzmann, 2002: 157*). By changing the way that we think about development, focusing instead on the capacities, skills and assets that exist within the neighbourhood, community development can occur from the inside-out, building on existing resources and harnessing those that are not yet available for local development purposes (*McKnight & Kretzmann, 2002: 159*).

Viewing us all as part of a single community provides a democratic, Freirean model for development. Because the structure is not hierarchical, all participants are able to

participate fully, not only in terms of simply providing man-power to fulfil a leader's vision, but actually having a say over how the process unfolds. This was made explicit in the audition workshops, where I consciously tried to position myself as a facilitator who was also a part of the team. By participating in some of the icebreakers, highlighting my fallibilities and presenting the workshops as flexible according to the contributions of the auditioners, I wanted to portray that while I did possess knowledge and skills in theatre-making, my understanding of teenage pregnancy in Delft was woefully lacking. Using rehearsals spaces in Delft and Salt River, eating sumptuous food cooked by various members of the clinic staff and being transported in the clinic's bakkie, resources from all of the constituents of the new community were drawn on.

After one of the audition workshops, when I was driving Lawona and Erica back to their office, Lawona asked me if I felt scared driving to Delft on my own. Being white, female and unfamiliar with the neighbourhood, I would certainly be a logical target for criminals in the area. I reflected on the question a while before answering that I was always quick to tell people that I was Proudly South African, but how could I make this claim without actually engaging with the country, and city, in which I was born, choosing rather to remain sheltered in my gated home? On a personal level, being a part of the TPG community provided me with an opportunity to participate in a development initiative in a way that I felt that I was contributing meaningfully in partnership with many people from different backgrounds. At no stage did I feel like a patronising, university-educated outsider with all the answers to the problems facing the youth of Delft, a role I would have felt loathe to fulfil. Rather, I felt honoured to be able to work with fellow Capetonians who had had such different lives to my own. While being a part of the TPG community provided me with the opportunity to hone my skills as an applied theatre practitioner and delve deeply into the issue of teenage pregnancy, I also learnt a lot about myself as a South African and the responsibility that I have to contribute to the development of my country. In no way do I believe that I can single-handedly improve the situation in communities such as Delft, but being a part of the TPG community did show me the importance of rolling my sleeves up and joining in the effort to make my country a better place to live. I have come to understand how much we all have to contribute, and believe that being a part of a community such as the

one that evolved around the teenage pregnancy project is the ideal vehicle for channelling these resources.

In examining the TPG project according to community building practice principles, it became clear to me that in this applied theatre initiative, a cycle was set in motion which, I believe, could become an extremely useful model for community development. Drama and theatre strategies were used to create a community. This community then contributed to the development of the piece of applied theatre, which in turn used drama and theatre techniques and tools to get learners to become a part of the community. This was as far as the TPG project went because of timing and funding constraints, but in an ideal context with plentiful resources, this cycle could continue with the learners creating pieces of applied theatre of their own. The community building practice would thus reach a wider range of people who would become part of the community, leading to personal and social development. This vision will be dealt with at a later stage. In the meantime, it is necessary to analyse the dramatic and theatrical elements of the TPG experience more deeply in order to understand applied theatre's role in the building of community. Since this will rely heavily on my interpretation of the TPG process as well as the words of my co-participants, I have remained vigilant regarding the preservation of the validity of the study. The issues involved in this, including measures undertaken, are highlighted in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### Validity

As in any qualitative study, there are certain issues that need to be acknowledged in order to assure the validity of the work. The first is the question of authorship. Taylor states that ‘qualitative reports are about formulating in-depth understandings of the perspectives of the stakeholders who come to applied theatre. The qualitative report embarks on a comprehensive inquiry of the multiple and shifting perspectives surrounding an applied theatre project’ (Taylor, 2003: 106).

While trying to uphold Taylor’s aims of representing multiple perspectives, it needs to be articulated that the analysis that is undertaken in this study is seen through my eyes, and is thus not divorceable from my identity. My culture, upbringing and life experiences have shaped my understandings, values, and the way I view the world, which no doubt impacts on the way that I perceive and report things to have happened. Throughout the TPG project I was very careful to record the various steps of the process. I made thorough outlines of the workshops I did with the group. Following these I made written memos documenting what happened in each particular session. As well as this, I documented many rehearsals and performances through photographs, and also filmed two performances.

Yet, it is impossible to claim that the way that I comprehend and rearticulate this data is the ‘right’ way, or the ‘true way’. My understanding of research is that it is a process through which ‘reality is interpreted and knowledge is constructed’ (Wickham *et al*, 1997: 9). This contrasts greatly to the opposing school of thought which claims that researchers work to discover knowledge that exists independently of their perceptions. I believe that researcher subjectivity cannot be ruled out. In fact, there is a double layer of interpretation at play in this analysis of the TPG: my initial memos, notes and audio-visual documentation were influenced by my subjectivity as I chose (for often seemingly arbitrary reasons such as time limitations, certain things piquing my interest and greater engagement with some issues for no definite reason) to record some things

and leave other things out. In the subsequent analysis of this data, a second level of author interpretation is carried out as this process occurs again.

In this regard I am influenced by Mattingly's report on a community theatre project with high school students in San Diego where she states, 'Since I played an active role in the project I am discussing, there is an element of bias in my analysis that I cannot escape. Nor would I want to, since it was my own discomfort which pushed me to make sense of what I saw' (*Mattingly, 2001: 447*). Because of this, it is my aim in this study to attempt to include my experiential knowledge in such a way that it is done in the spirit of 'critical subjectivity' (*Maxwell, 1996: 28*) in order to ensure that it does not simply become a medium for the expression of my subjective experiences. It would be easy to provide a narrative of my experiences, but I question the academic usefulness of this for myself and others who are interested in the subject matter. Rather, I will use my experiences in order to critically examine how the fields of applied theatre and community building practice intersected during the TPG and the implications of this, always considering how my values, beliefs and prior experiences impact on the way in which I am perceiving the data.

Following the first run of the TPG project in Delft and Belhar, I conducted individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with the six cast members. These were recorded on audiotape and subsequently transcribed. A possible challenge to the validity of this study is that the interview questions were not specifically designed to elicit information about community building. Thus, the data that I gathered from the interviews may be construed as invalid. The metaphor of 'researcher as miner' (*Kvale, 1996: 3*), digging through the data in order to find evidence that supports his/her argument, may be called to mind. This contrasts with the perhaps more qualitatively ideal envisioning of 'researcher as traveler' (*Kvale, 1996: 4*), where the landscape of research is perused, and the results of this form the basis of the argument.

I counter this by assuring that the questions on the interview schedule were especially designed to present an overall understanding of the development and performance process of the TPG project. In their interviews, the cast members reported on the



various stages of the process, and it is exactly this which I wish to investigate in this study. It would be unethical of me to assume that my hypothesis regarding the nature of the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice is appropriate without taking into consideration any disparate views that the other participants involved in this very social process may have. As such, the interviews hold an important evidential place in this study and every effort has been made to maintain the integrity of the words of my co-participants.

Another threat to the validity of this report stems from the difficulty in gathering primary evidence regarding the learners' contributions within the group work stages of the TPG play. Although I listened in on the discussions that the actors held with the learners, my inability to follow the rapid, heavily accented, slang-laden Afrikaans in which they were conducted worked against a complete understanding of what was being said. Also, the learners would often confide in the actor-facilitators during the group work, meaning that when any 'outsider', including myself, approached a group, they would fall silent and disengage from the discussion. Some of the actors would also change their approach as I drew nearer, perhaps self-conscious about the direction that their discussions had taken or not wishing to break the bonds of trust that had been formed with the learners. Although I filmed two performances, the poor acoustic quality of the venue as well as the background noise from other groups mean that the discussions are barely audible and thus very difficult to follow. These mitigating circumstances notwithstanding, I have tried to the best of my ability to portray the learners' contributions as they actually occurred. Descriptions of what happened within the groups are not only drawn from my recollections but also from my notes made during performances, as well as from the actors' reports on their experiences of facilitating the groups.

A key challenge to researchers who are intimately involved with the phenomena that they are researching is that they may be unable to maintain their attitudes of critical analysis. Often, critical distance is necessary in order to view the 'bigger picture' surrounding a phenomenon. For a researcher who is so engulfed in his/her subject matter, this may be difficult to obtain. Also, Neuman (1997) outlines some of the

dilemmas that those compiling field reports often face. Researchers may come to have intimate knowledge of those with whom he/she has worked, and this may lead to 'a dilemma between the right of privacy and the right to know' (*Neuman, 1997: 377*). Often, in not wanting to publicise anything that might offend or harm those being researched, researchers may omit critical details. This could lead to studies that are difficult to believe or to understand.

In order to ensure that the outcomes of this study are valid, certain checks have been put in place. Because my Masters supervisor was also closely involved with the TPG, I have been able to verify my conclusions with her at various stages of the research process. Also, a preliminary draft of this study was presented to the clinic in Delft and two of the cast members, and their suggestions and criticisms were incorporated into the final version. In the next chapter, I provide an in-depth analysis of the dramatic and theatrical elements used in the TPG project. My hope is that the triangulation of sources has contributed to the creation of a study that takes into consideration Taylor's 'multiple and shifting perspectives' (*Taylor, 2003: 106*) and that this provides the reader with as full and rich a picture of the TPG project as possible.

## CHAPTER 4

### Dramatic and Theatrical Elements Used in the TPG Project

Earlier in this study I formulated the hypothesis that the theatrical and dramatic possibilities offered by the applied theatre process are useful methods of developing community building practice. In analysing the TPG, I will draw on the views of my co-participants as expressed in their interviews in order to gain deeper insight into the ways that they perceive the process as having affected them. Before doing this, however, I use this chapter to provide an overview of the dramatic techniques that were utilised as we come together to form the TPG and in the interactive performance that we eventually took to schools. Often there is an overlap in the strategies that were used. For example, icebreakers were used both in the initial stages of the project as the cast and I were getting to know each other and during the performances. Also, icebreakers very often involve some level of improvisation or role-play.

#### 4.1. Icebreakers

I use the term icebreakers to encompass those drama-based exercises and games which, while not necessarily contributing directly to the creation of the grand narrative of the piece of theatre that was eventually performed in schools, were integral to the process that the TPG undertook. There are various uses for such exercises. Many professional performers incorporate them into their training as a means of focusing awareness and concentration and as a physical warm-up, while educators, either teaching drama or using it as a means to teach other subjects, may utilise them in the classroom. In his '147 Practical Tips for Using Icebreakers with College Students', Robert Magnum (2005) outlines some of the general uses of icebreakers (<http://www.atwoodpublishing.com/tocs/225toc.htm>). According to him, icebreakers help introduce the facilitator to the participants, contribute to the creation of a comfortable environment for those involved and put in motion a process whereby participants get to know one another. By establishing an active, participatory environment, icebreakers

encourage participants to share and explore their differences as well as the information and resources that they may hold.

There are numerous sources where those wishing to incorporate some sort of icebreakers into their endeavours can look to find appropriate exercises and games. The internet is a useful start, with a 'google' search yielding thousands of relevant pages. For the purpose of the TPG project, most of the icebreakers I undertook with the group at the initial stages of the initiative were gleaned from *Theatresports down under: a guide for coaches and players* (1995) by Lyn Pierse and from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992) by Augusto Boal. Pierse's guide to Theatresports, an amalgam of sports and theatre that sees two teams compete with each other to create improvised scenes based on structured games, proved useful because it describes training and warm-up games as well as many of those used in actual Theatresport events. Because, like applied theatre, Theatresports is an interactive theatrical event that encourages participation from all involved, the games were beneficial to the process that I facilitated in that they were stimulating and immediate, requiring quick-thinking and skilful teamwork - all qualities that I wished to incorporate into the ethos of the TPG.

In *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992), Boal documents his techniques of Image, Invisible and Forum Theatre. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve deeply into these, but suffice to say that all three signify attempts to create forms of theatre that break down the traditional boundary between actor and audience in order to create 'spect-actors' capable of envisioning strategies for change in their own lives. In his book, Boal records what he terms 'the arsenal of theatre of the oppressed' (Boal, 1992: 60), a collection of 'gamercises' (in that 'there is a fair proportion of exercises in the games and a fair proportion of game in the exercises' [Boal, 1992: 60]). These aim to provide a better physical awareness of the body and its mechanisms as well as the increased potential of the body to emit and receive messages from the world around it. Since the members of the TPG possessed little or no experience in theatre prior to their involvement with the project, I felt it was necessary to present them with opportunities to become familiar with the body as an expressive medium. Boal's exercises and games, which focus on the development and extension of the individual's familiarity with and

confidence in his/her physical and imaginative ability provided useful methods through which to instigate this.

Of course, with the premise of the use of theatre and drama within any participatory context being its usefulness as a spur for spontaneous action and reaction from those involved, I did not follow any set formula with regards to which icebreakers I utilised. Rather, I determined the aims that I needed to fulfil and then utilised or developed appropriate icebreakers in response to these. For example, at the audition stage of the process, I realised that it would be necessary to structure workshops that made it possible for me to get a sense of the potential of the would-be participants to speak clearly, to move well and to contribute to the group intellectually and in terms of creating a positive work environment. Inherent in this was getting to know the participants, making myself familiar to them, establishing my position in relation to them and creating a upbeat space where we all would feel enthused and comfortable to participate.

The first workshop thus began with the participants and me standing in a circle. As would subsequently become a tradition within the TPG, we started with a physical warm-up of stretches and shakes in order to awaken the body and create a separation between the rest of the day and the process that we were about to undertake together. A simple name-game followed, with each person saying their name and performing a movement, which the entire group copied. Already at this early stage, we were opening up to each other, giggling at one another's movements as we repeated them ourselves. In order to get to know one another, the participants were put into pairs and given the brief that each person was to tell their partner about themselves. After this, each person was given the opportunity to report back to the group what they had learnt about their partner. Ability to think on one's feet was stimulated through the broom game, in which a broom is laid in the centre of a circle and participants enter the circle at will in order to mime utilising it for different purposes, for example as a microphone or a pogo stick. Another pair-work exercise that we did was for each pair to shake hands and freeze. After a moment, one of the people would exit the frozen image, look at the posture of his/her partner, and then re-enter the image in another imagined context.

I was aware that this was a very formative stage in the process with regards to how the cast members viewed me. I was sure to join in the group activities, such as the name games or the physical exercises we all did together. When the number of individuals who had come to the workshop required it, I would join in the pair-work so that everybody had a partner. I was sensitive to the possibility of appearing as a patronising outsider – telling the cast members what to do and then measuring them up critically. Thus the games and exercises that we did were especially chosen as icebreakers because they were non-threatening and I participated with enthusiasm throughout.

Similar icebreakers were introduced frequently throughout the theatre-making process in order to provide a respite from the heavy subject matter with which we were grappling and to ensure that the TPG were constantly developing as actors. Games such as ‘What are you doing?’ were frequent occurrences. In this game, the participants stand in a circle. Someone mimes an activity. The next person in the circle says ‘What are you doing?’. The person miming replies an activity totally different to that which he/she is miming. The next person in the circle then has to mime that activity. And so it continues. We also did breathing and vocal exercises, aimed at ensuring that the TPG would be audible in the sometimes cavernous halls in which we knew we would be performing.

Icebreakers were later included in the play that the TPG eventually developed and performed at the schools. The learners were divided into groups, with each actor leading his/her group through a series of icebreakers. These were done for much the same reason as they were at the initial stages of the project – so that each actor (now performing the role of facilitator, as I did earlier in the process) could form a bond with his/her group, to signify to the learners that they were about to take part in a process very unlike that which they were used to and to open up channels of communication that would be drawn on later in the performance. To this end, the actors chose three of the games that we had played together during the theatre-making process to play with the learners – the name game described above, a game in which a ‘clap’ of the hands is passed swiftly around and eventually across the circle and a tricky exercise in which

each person in the circle has a turn to open the fingers of his/her hands, one finger at a time from left thumb to right little finger, one after the other in the circle, with the aim of creating a continuous, fluid movement of fingers around the whole circle.

## 4.2. Role-play

Once the cast of the teenage pregnancy group had been finalised we moved into what I term the exploratory phase of the process. Three days were spent teasing out the issues surrounding teenage pregnancy. I knew that my understanding of the phenomenon would be different to that of my fellow TPG members. Lawona and Erica, the peer group educators from the South African Clothing and Textile Worker's Union had provided me with a script for an HIV/AIDS play that had been written and directed for them by a specially hired theatre professional a few years past. The script was certainly didactic, and while I cannot comment on the success of that production, it made me realise that I was not willing to take responsibility for providing the definitive narrative about teenage pregnancy in Delft with so many gaps in my knowledge. I decided that it was important that the TPG dedicate time to exploring the issue that we were to deal with thoroughly, before setting about constructing a play plot.

It was at this stage that a breaking down of the traditional theatrical structure occurred that was along the lines of Freire's vision for the abolishment of banking education. In the example of the HIV/AIDS script that was shown to me, the playwright/director, who was of high status with regards to the theatrical production, had told the actors what to say, how to say it and where to move. Because of her theatrical experience, she held the power and knowledge in the context of the HIV/AIDS endeavour. I was so adamant that time should be spent grappling with the subject matter for the very purpose of avoiding this traditional structure. I wanted to draw on the knowledge that I knew my team-members held -- having gotten to know them briefly at the auditions, I already had a sense of the wealth of experiential resources that they would bring to the project. I cannot claim that the decision to draw on my cast members' knowledge was taken purely for their benefit, in order to increase empowerment and self-efficacy (although it

is hoped that this did occur). Rather, as a novice in the field of applied theatre facilitation and having grown up in a sheltered environment, I knew that I would need input, help and support from those who had first-hand knowledge of life in Delft in order to facilitate the creation of a piece of theatre that was in anyway acceptable and effective. Also, Prof. Morris had indicated to me that the actors would teach best what they knew best – they would be able to communicate material generated by them more effectively than something imposed on them from the outside.

While we did engage in many lengthy, powerful discussions which I discuss at a later stage, during this stage of the process I set in motion several theatrical role-plays that turned out to be instrumental in shaping both my and my team-members' understandings of teenage pregnancy. It was useful to have the opportunity to share our understandings of the phenomenon because it allowed us to 'get the big picture' of where our thinking was 'at' as a group. At this stage, we did not try to pave over differences in ideologies or create one coherent overview of teenage pregnancy. The process was cyclical in that the more we came to know each other's viewpoints, the more complex the subject matter became, which in turn led to more sharing and a deeper understanding.

I facilitated several role-plays with the group in those three days. In one, I assumed the role of the assistant to the head of a large marketing corporation. The premise was that my company had received an enormous sum of money from a foreign donor to spend in a campaign against teenage pregnancy. They were, I informed them, the top advertising executives in the country who had been brought together in order to develop strategies for the campaign. Working in pairs, the 'executives' were given twenty minutes to develop their advertising campaigns after which time they had an opportunity to present their work to all present.

I structured this particular role-play for several reasons. Firstly, I wanted the actors, who had little or no theatrical experience, to become more familiar with the idea of operating in the make-believe world. Secondly, because it was our first attempt at working on improvised role-plays, I chose to give the TPG members the opportunity to work on a



scenario which would not overwhelm them with the serious personal repercussions involved in an issue such as teenage pregnancy. I worried that beginning our exploration of role-play with an emotionally-demanding improvisation would have the effect of putting the actors off role-play forever! With the constant influence of the media and marketing in our lives, I knew that developing a campaign against teenage pregnancy would come naturally to the group, especially because I had stipulated, in role, that money was of no concern. Finally, witnessing the role-play was useful to me because I got a sense of the central areas of concern around which the actors' views about teenage pregnancy were shaped. For example, an unexpected outcome of the role-play was the importance that was placed by the TPG on targeting the campaign at parents of teenagers as well. This was an aspect that I had not previously thought about, and that was, at a later stage, incorporated into the final piece of theatre.

Another role-play was based on a short newspaper article that reported the disappearance of a Cape Flats teenager who left her baby in her mother's care before leaving the house. At the time of the article's publication, more than a month had past since the teenager had last been seen, and her mother had discovered that she had taken all her personal documents with her when she left the house. The TPG members were given some time to think about what had happened to the teenager in the preceding 24 hours that led up to this action on her part. Following this, we did a group role-play, exploring what we thought happened when the mother worked out that her daughter had gone. Employing a structure that we had used earlier in the process, whereby somebody starts the improvisation and other people join in one at a time, establishing who they are and the relationship that they have with one another, we played out a possible scenario, replete with relatives, nosy neighbours and helpful policemen.

Keith Johnston (1979) describes the improviser as 'a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but pays no attention to the future. His story can take him anyway, but he must still balance it, and give it shape, by remembering incidents that have been shelved and reincorporating them' (*Johnstone, 1979: 116*). By demanding such commitment and focus from participants, these role-plays raise the stakes around the issue of teenage pregnancy for those involved by making the issues far more immediate

and, to a certain extent, more real. The person in the second example I described who puts him/herself into the drama in the role of the neighbour, for example, has no time to contemplate an appropriate response to the situation carefully based on drawn-out considerations. Rather, his/her reaction has to be immediate, and because nobody involved in the group role-play knows what anybody else is going to say or do, it remains a volatile ground for the exploration of the way people think or act.

Yet, because the narrative that we constructed around the event of the teenager's disappearance was fictional, the participants were not under pressure to perform events correctly or truthfully. The space was supportive – because the actors by that time knew and cared about one another, they supported the suggestions offered by their peers by accepting them and incorporating them into the unfolding narrative. Keith Johnstone refers to this as 'blocking and accepting offers' (*Johnstone, 1979: 94*). He describes how effective improvisation relies on participants accepting each other's improvised 'offers', which is his word for anything that they actors do. Each offer can either be accepted or blocked. Constant blocking wipes out other participants' premises and prevents the possibility of any action developing. Alternatively, accepting offers allows those involved in the improvisation to move forward with the action, which is how the TPG members grew accustomed to improvising. Also, because they were in role as fictional people involved in the aftermath of the teenager's disappearance, the actors knew that they personally could not be judged or criticised because of what their character said. Because of this, one of the participants who was initially reticent to join in discussions and debates because of self-consciousness, was able to find a vehicle for his contributions.

When deeming it appropriate, I would join the role-plays. In the advertising executive example described above, my role as the assistant to a powerful businessman was pivotal to the ensuing role-play. In role, I put across information about who and where the TPG members were in the context of the drama, and what the task was that they were to fulfil. In the second example, I was more reticent, observing the improvisation and only entering the playing space if I felt that the action was getting stuck and needed to be stimulated or challenged by a radical viewpoint. For example, at one stage I

pretended to be a neighbour who had no sympathy for the girl at all and believed that she was selfish and that it would be better for all if she didn't come back. This resulted in an uproar from the other characters, and was the spur for some interesting dramatic conflict.

Morgan and Saxton (1989) write about the advantages of school teachers adopting a role with their drama classes. Doing this allows the teacher, who is within the drama and can view with the class what is happening, to control the pace and tension because he/she is in touch with the internal rhythm (*Morgan & Saxton, 1989: 41*). It is this function that I wished to fulfil in my role as the assistant to the head of the marketing corporation. Morgan and Saxton term such a role 'second in command' (*Morgan & Saxton, 1989: 42*) because the facilitator acts as a go-between, not overtly in control but with the connections to refer to a higher authority for instructions. This is a flexible role because the facilitator can relinquish authority or take full authority as the situation demands, while still tapping the internal rhythm of the improvisation throughout. In an example such as the missing teenager improvisation, I adopted more of a 'one of the gang' (*Morgan & Saxton, 1989: 43*) role. I voiced my opinions as the judgmental neighbour, but because my role was not one of authority, my opinions carried no more weight in terms of repercussions than those of the other participants.

My participation in the role-plays was not only important in terms of getting the most thorough possible understanding of teenage pregnancy. In my decision to work together with the other TPG members, they were given the space to challenge me with confidence (*Morgan & Saxton, 1989: 41*). What boundaries may have existed between us, with me in the more traditionally powerful position of theatre-maker, were dissolved during such improvisations because the actors were provided with the opportunity to express attitudes and points of view within the safety of their roles. As I relinquished my authority in role, my co-participants were faced with the opportunity to make decisions and take responsibility for these. While this may have occurred in the make-believe contexts that the play was situated in, this negotiation of power structures certainly had repercussions in the way that we operated as a team outside of the improvisations.

Elements of improvisation and role-play were also brought into the performances that we eventually did at the schools. At a crucial moment midway through the play, the drama stopped and the actors summoned the groups that they had done their icebreakers with at the start of the program to gather around them. They addressed the learners in role as their characters from the play, asking the learners for their advice and opinions about what had occurred up until that point and what action they should take next. The actors playing Zoe, Shawn and the mother positioned themselves as ‘the helpless’ (*Morgan & Saxton, 1989: 44*), appealing to their groups about what action they should take next, always challenging them to extend their thinking by putting up plausible obstacles to their suggestions. For example, the actor playing the mother was told in one of the schools that she should send her daughter to boarding school. To this she responded that she earned such low pay from the factory that she could never afford the high school fees. The learners were then forced to think of new solutions to her problems, one of which was for her to give a house-key to her neighbour so that Zoe and Justin could be checked on intermittently during the day. When Shawn asked his group whether or not he should have sex with Zoe, he was usually greeted with a mixed reaction. He was often told to wait until he was older, or to use a condom if he was going to have sex. One learner told him that it was his choice, and ultimately he would have to make the decision about whether to take the step or not. Zoe was regularly told not to have sex until she was married. When she replied that she and Shawn were in love, she was told that ‘true love waits’ and that if Shawn loved her, he wouldn’t rush her into sleeping with him.

The actors playing both Justin and Janine adopted a devil’s advocate stance, flouting their ‘bad’ behaviour and defying the judgments of the learners with whom they were working by exhibiting no remorse at all. When Janine put forth her belief that if one uses a condom, one can get pregnant and contract AIDS, the learners told her that she was lying – that their teacher had told them that condoms led to safe sex. Janine countered by telling them that their teacher was a liar, which led to much angry debate back and forth. It was clear that the learners were well-versed in the ABC (Abstain, Be faithful, Condomise) of safe sex. Justin’s group sessions often turned into an insult-

slinging match. When Justin would say that you can get AIDS from using a condom, the learners would shout '*Jy kan nie!*' (You can't!), to which he would reply '*Jy kan!*' (You can!). This would continue until Justin would say something else controversial, which would strike the conflict up again. Inevitably both Justin and Janine incurred the wrath of their groups through statements such as 'It's my life – I can do whatever I want to'. The learners would tell them that they needed to think of the repercussions of their actions, and so forth – just the lessons that the TPG wanted the learners to learn themselves.

### 4.3. Discussion

In *Drama Structures*, O'Neill and Lambert stress the importance of discussion and reflection in the context of drama work (O'Neill & Lambert, 1982: 142). According to them, making effective use of these is likely to require as much skill as the structuring of the drama itself. A well-handled discussion can serve the purpose of considering alternative points of view, reviewing the progress of the drama, defining and resolving problems posed by the context or the form as well as evaluating and reflecting on the work.

The process that the TPG undertook was peppered throughout by many in-depth discussions. From the first audition workshop it became clear that the participants were, for the most part, willing and keen to engage in discussions, and I marvelled at how quickly they opened up and were willing to share their (often turbulent) life histories with one another. Whether this was a stimulus for the building of community or a product resulting from the community building practice principles that I understand as inherent in applied theatre is unclear. Probably, it was both, since Walter's (2002) reconceptualisation of community indicates that it is 'continually being created and re-created, its parameters and relationships taking shape and changing shape' (Walter, 2002: 71). Either way, from this first discussion, in which I got a sense of how deeply connected to the issue of teenage pregnancy the participants were, I realised that this would be a valuable source of information for the group to eventually draw on in the

creation of the play that was to tour schools. Thus, although I carefully pre-structured all of our sessions together, I remained flexible to the possibility of a discussion starting up, generally choosing to let it develop rather than suppressing it because of time demands. I was careful to record all that I learnt during those sessions once I was alone again. These notes formed a useful resource base from which to draw in the creation of the play.

The subject matter covered in these discussions varied from personal experiences that the actors wished to share with one another to debates around relevant issues such as contraception, abortion and the role of the media in determining the behaviour of young adults. In my opinion, the worth of these discussions extended beyond gathering information that could be used in the play. The sharing of (often very personal) experiences served to bond the group together and create an air of complicity amongst us. Knowing that we all shared a pool of intimate knowledge about the other TPG members pulled and held us together. One of the members was due to be married during the process, and sharing the plans for the wedding, while not strictly contributing to the development of the TPG play, certainly served to draw us together as a group, as we debated certain theories around the marriage and tried to provide emotional support to the groom-to-be.

I was also not adamant that we always discuss issues that were relevant to the TPG project. I knew that getting to know one another was an important step that could not be bypassed if we were to be working daily with one another for a number of months. Since discussion could facilitate this process, I did not strictly dictate what could or couldn't be spoken about. It was also very important for me, having come from a background so different from those of the people that I was working with, to be able to contribute to these discussions so that the TPG members got to know me as a person – not just as an outsider who had entered the group with a specific agenda to fulfil. For example, in one of the sessions I was asked about my religion. Having the opportunity to share my experiences of being Jewish and describing some of the traditions and principles to the group had a bridging effect between us. At appropriate stages of the discussion, I would share my own concerns about teenage pregnancy and we would

delve into the differences between the way that we all responded to the issue and the reasons for this.

These discussions often began spontaneously, between activities or during a lunch break. Sometimes a simple question regarding what someone had done the previous day would spur on a deep, issue-based discussion. I also used certain stimuli in order to invite an interesting debate. For example, during the exploratory phase of the process, one of the activities I designed for the group was for each member to create two collages from pictures in magazines – the first portraying what he/she thought of sex at the age of ten, and the second portraying what he/she thought of it now. Each participant then presented their work to the group, describing the collage that they had created. The viewers all had responses and questions to what they saw before them. This provided the fodder for an in-depth discussion about changing perceptions towards sex.

In another session I asked the participants to brainstorm as many keywords as they could that were in any way related to the issue of teenage pregnancy in order to decide exactly what the TPG play was going to be about. These keywords were all written down on small pieces of paper. The actors were then asked to move these small papers around until the words were arranged in different groups of specific numbers depending on their perceived importance for the play that we were to create – three ‘most important’, five ‘important’, the rest ‘not as important’. Because everybody had different opinions regarding the ranking of the issues, an interesting debate was sparked based on the subject at hand. The results of the exercise also provided a framework of issues around which the program that we eventually developed was structured.

A portion of time was also allocated to reflection and discussion with the learners during the actual TPG performances. Following the conclusion of the dramatic narrative, the learners broke into their groups for the third time, led by the actor with whom they had been working throughout. This time, the actor communicated with the learners out of role. The aim was to tease out the issues that had come up for the learners during the play and to get a sense of what had been learnt from the experience. While the actors were not given any strict brief to follow regarding what questions to

ask, they were encouraged to challenge the learners, to extend their thinking and question any apparent hypocrisies or conflicts that had come up over the course of the program. Thus the topics of the discussions ranged from who the learners talked about sex with to whether, when they grew up, they would discuss issues of a sexual nature with their own children. All of the actors described how, by this stage of the program, the learners were communicating freely and openly with them. When a teacher, a member of the clinic staff, Prof. Morris or I would approach the groups in order to try to gauge what was being said, our presence would cause the conversation to taper off, proving that the learners felt safe to reveal parts of themselves within their small groups. A certain level of confidence and trust was encouraged and established throughout the group-work that enabled this kind of intimate communication to occur.

We hoped that in stimulating the learners to engage in talk, to articulate their experiences and understandings, we would be contributing to the development of Freire's notion of critical consciousness whereby the learners are able to perceive critically 'the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves' (*Freire, 1972: 56*). An example of this occurred in one of Fawziyah's (the actress who played 'Janine') reflection sessions, when she asked the learners why, when boys have sex with lots of girls are they thought of as 'macho', while when girls sleep with many men, they are branded loose? One of the learners replied that this was because boys are constantly pushing for progress, while girls stay the same. Rather than accepting this answer, Fawziyah asked the learner why he had said this, which forced him to interrogate his own thinking more deeply. Freire posits that critical consciousness affects the way people take action because action is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Thus, the hope is that by this learner entering into this dialogue with Fawziyah, he would have been compelled to investigate his own beliefs about gender and sexuality more intensely than he normally does, perhaps causing him to alter the way he understands male/female relations. By understanding and articulating their positions with regards to the drama and the way that it related to their own lives, the learners would hopefully be driven to take actions that represent the best possible choices for their lives at this time.



#### 4.4. Playmaking

Before my participation in the TPG had commenced, I was daunted by the process of playmaking that I knew would have to take place in order to develop a play to present at the schools. While I valued the TPG members' experiences and realised their potential as facilitators, I was initially at a loss regarding how to harness all of these resources so that a single play could emerge. The gap between where we were and the polished performance that was scheduled to be completed within two weeks seemed immense, and I was unsure which methodologies should be implemented to bridge them.

We began by deciding as a group that the main protagonist should be a female Grade 9 learner whom we named 'Zoe'. Although we were adamant not to perpetuate the gender stereotype that boys were after 'only one thing', we had come to the realisation during the exploratory workshops that young girls seemed to be giving up their power regarding their sexuality without careful consideration. We decided that it would thus be useful to explore such a character as the centre of the narrative that we were to create. From here, we set about improvising the girl's family and friends. The role-plays that we had engaged in during the exploratory phase of the process meant that the TPG members were already familiar with the skills required to improvise new characters.

In *Devising Theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook*, Alison Oddey writes that 'a combination of instinct and learning is required to devise theater. This can only be learnt on the job' (Oddey, 1993: 26). This was certainly true for both the actors and me as we felt our way through the playmaking process. Not following any tried-and-tested instructions, we worked largely by instinct. The actors would improvise short scenes featuring the characters that they had created, following which we would discuss whether they had been effective or not, and suggest alternative possibilities. In this way, each scene would be reworked until we all agreed on the product that we had arrived at. During rehearsals, I would make notes about our activities, which I would write up formally during the evenings and present back to the actors at the next rehearsal.

Oddey also explains that ‘at some point in the process, a director or “outside eye” is needed to edit or discard material, make technical decisions and lead the group overall’ (*Oddey, 1993: 26*). It is possible that had both the actors and I had been more experienced in devising theatre, I could have performed this function. They could have improvised on their own and presented what they had developed to me. With an outsider’s eye, I would have been able to offer useful feedback that they could have incorporated into further efforts. However, given our lack of experience in the field, Prof. Morris proved invaluable in helping us shape the loose narrative that we had developed into a plot that was appropriate for the play that we were attempting to create. Being immersed in the playmaking experience resulted in the actors and I often being unable to judge our efforts critically, so being able to draw on someone detached from day-to-day involvement in the playmaking process was very useful.

It was hoped that the actors’ involvement in the playmaking process would prove empowering in and of itself. Minkler and Wallerstein point out that although the term ‘empowerment’ has been criticised as a ‘catch-all phrase’, it nevertheless represents a central tenet of social transformation (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 288*). They define empowerment as ‘a social action process by which individuals, communities, and organisations gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life’ (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002: 289*). The hope was that creating space for the actors to participate so fully in the playmaking process would result in increased empowerment. Drawing on their own experiences in the development of the narrative as well as making artistic decisions about how to ensure that the play effectively portray the full spectrum of complexities that we had unearthed during our time together transferred the resources of playmaking into the actors’ hands. Because we were working by consensus, with all decisions being made by the group as a whole, the actors always felt free to speak their minds and offer their suggestions. One example of this occurred when we were trying to block the scene in which Zoe kisses her boyfriend, Shawn, for the first time. The two actors, Chantal and Shawn, were clearly shy about kissing each other, and thus resorted to a short peck on the lips before springing apart. The rest of the group was quick to point out that this was never how a first kiss between two teenagers actually took place. The other actors

took turns acting out their suggestions – the tension before the kiss, perhaps a nervous giggle immediately after. This way, guidance was offered to Chantal and Shawn, whose kiss certainly became a high point in the program for the audiences of learners! The actors were empowered to make important decisions about the development of the play, which in turn increased their sense of ownership of the finished product.

It was Prof. Morris's suggestion that we incorporate three group sessions in which the learners had a chance to interact with the actors. The actors understood the usefulness of this idea, and we practised group facilitation in rehearsals, with the actors taking turns leading group work while the rest of us pretended to be learners. The interactive components of the TPG play have been described in more detail above, but it is worth reiterating that we hoped that through their participation in the program, the learners would get a sense of the empowerment that the actors experienced during the process of playmaking. Describing an applied theatre program for teen mothers in Washington, Susan Haedicke (2001) explains how, 'audience members become creators when they talk about the experiences of the characters' (*Haedicke, 2001: 272*). We hoped that through their participation in the TPG play, the learners would have the opportunity to join in the creation of the make-believe world that the TPG members had developed. As Wiley and Feiner (2001) point out, applied theatre performances 'become occasions for fresh interchange, collaboration, and collective creation rather than just presentations of the work of a relatively small group of community theatre makers' (*Wiley & Feiner, 2001: 136*). The TPG play differed with each performance, depending on the contributions from the learners. By empowering the learners to become involved by joining in the fictional characters' worlds as well as sharing their own stories and opinions, it was hoped that they would have an opportunity to experience both the process and outcome of the expansion of power required to create social change. Haedicke sums up the link between empowerment within an applied theatre project and real-life when she explains that, 'transforming spectators into artists does more than validate their creativity: it empowers them to change things for the better because in re-experiencing their artistry, they will be able to articulate their needs, articulate their hopes, and feel that they do make a difference' (*Haedicke, 2001: 272*).

#### 4.5. Dramatic and Theatrical Elements: A Summation

This in-depth analysis of the dramatic and theatrical elements used during the TPG project serves to illuminate the stages of an applied theatre initiative to those readers with little experience of the medium. At the same time, it familiarises readers with the processes that resulted in the TPG project so that Chapter 5, which deals with *how* these elements come together to embody the principles of community building practice, can be understood. Moreover, interrogating my own practice regarding my use of icebreakers, role-plays, improvisations and techniques of playmaking within the TPG project has been personally enlightening in that it highlighted the many power relations at play during the project. Getting a sense of how I situated myself in relation to these is essential to my growth as an applied theatre practitioner in that evaluating my own performance during the TPG is essential if I am to develop in terms of skills and confidence. Also, understanding my shifting status in relation to my co-participants is especially important in a study such as this one, which advocates a departure from traditional expert-led methods of social development in favour of an ethos of inclusion and participation. This principle is extended into Chapter 5, in which I draw on the words of my co-participants. This is done with full and ready acknowledgement that their opinions will contribute to a more composite, nuanced understanding of the TPG process than any I could hope to develop on my own.

## CHAPTER 5

### How the TPG Embodied Community Building Practice Principles

In highlighting how the icebreakers, role-plays, discussions and playmaking process that I undertook with the TPG formed the basis of the eventual play that toured to the schools, I have made apparent the theatrical tools used in its conception and development. Examining how these methodologies function within both the theatre-making and performance spheres of the project provides an overview of the methodologies that I claim, in the central argument of this paper, contribute to implementation of the principles of community building practice. A central issue that still needs to be addressed is *how* this process takes place. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how these icebreakers, role-plays, discussions and the playmaking process led to the building of community amongst the TPG, I felt that it was necessary to draw on the words of my co-participants who had lived the experience as deeply as I had and would be able to contribute different perspectives on the effects of the process.

As previously stated, my co-participants' interview schedules were coded according to my research questions. These codes were then organised so that the essential themes could emerge. What became apparent through this exercise is that the actors placed particular importance on the elements of *participation* throughout the TPG project. Also, their responses reveal that there existed within the group two happy balances: between *learning and teaching* and *development of self and team*. These three central themes are not mutually exclusive – there are clear overlaps between them at certain points. It is, however, worthwhile to examine them in more depth in order to understand exactly how the theatrical and dramatic methodologies examined contributed to community building.

## 5.1. Participation

When asked about the genesis of the actual TPG play, Graeme explained:

*'We all gave some pieces of the story. I gave the name "Zoe", somebody gave the name "Justin". We all made the story up. We all did it.'*

*Graeme, TPG member*

Graeme's words echo sentiments expressed by all six of the TPG members in their interviews. It appears that there existed amongst the cast a sense of freedom that allowed them to feel as if their input to the process was integral and valuable to the progress of the theatre-making project – which it certainly was. Whether this was a by-product of the free, open atmosphere that I tried to create from the outset of the project, encouraging ideas and opinions through icebreakers, role-plays, improvisations and discussions, is uncertain. Perhaps it was simply good luck that the actors whom I chose to be part of the program seemed to 'click' together and because of this they felt comfortable enough to share their contributions with the rest of the group. Either way, the actors certainly felt that their participation played a large role in the TPG experience being so positive, both in the sense that we all enjoyed working with one another and in that we were happy with the play that we eventually developed. Erica describes the way we went about creating the narrative of the play:

*'... we mos sat down together and we... you gave like say the idea of what you wanted and together we explored it. And everybody came with their ideas and we just took it down. And then you mos wrote it down and you would come the next day and say, 'Listen guys this is what you... what I've got, what do you think about it?' And I think it went on for three to four, five days until we finally said, 'No, this is what we're satisfied with'. Because everyday we would add something. The other day we would take something away, always keeping in the back of our minds what we learnt, what the kids taught us. And it went along quite smoothly nogal.'*

*Erica, TPG member*

Erica's confusion regarding which pronoun to use (i.e. 'you'/'I'/'we') is telling. Choosing to read her words in a way that I gave the main idea and had final say over the process affords me more power in the process than if we understand her to entrench herself and the rest of the TPG more deeply in the decisions made. Either way, it is clear from her description that the TPG members certainly had a say in the way the narrative developed. The difference lies in the varying intensity of participation. While I consulted the rest of the group throughout the process, whether constructing the narrative, structuring the play or directing each scene, the group was certainly not autonomous from me. I did have the final say over what should and shouldn't be included, and because of my expertise in the field of drama, if I didn't think that a character or action was in the best interest of the play, I had the power to override the suggestions of the rest of the group. For example, when my supervisor and myself developed the idea of the eventual structure of the play (i.e. that there would be three opportunities for the actors to interact with the learners), I was in a position to impose that structure on the rest of the group.

Yet, at the risk of sounding idealistic, this did not lead to conflict or mutiny from the other team-members. If there was something that I believed could add value to the piece of theatre, I would consult with the rest of the team. Sometimes a debate would ensue and I would be convinced that my suggestion was not a particularly good one. In such situations, we would work together to develop alternate strategies. I believe that this was because we were all on the same 'team', as they say. The TPG members, consisting of unemployed youths as well as peer health educators from the South African Clothing and Textile Worker's Union, my supervisor and I had formed a multidimensional community through the process that we went through together.

Some days, certain TPG members would be unwilling/unable to participate in the activities that the group undertook. During the three exploratory sessions that we undertook, Graeme was suffering from severe backache and, as such, did not feel he could contribute to the work that the team was doing. When asked about those sessions, he reports:

*'My mind was just by my pains. Sometimes my mind was there, sometimes not. I just had to sit the whole time, that's all. I'm serious, I didn't know nothing about those three days.'*

*Graeme, TPG member*

When a member of the team was so indisposed, it created a sense of imbalance amongst everybody else. Something just didn't feel 'right' when the flow of group participation was disrupted. Yet, as Walter (2002) points out, the community that was in the process of being formed through the activities that we were undertaking embodied what she aptly refers to as 'communityness' (Walter, 2002: 73) in that they were supportive of one another. Even if work was disrupted on certain occasions, they were not judgmental or angry with the members who did not participate for various reasons. As Lawona describes:

*'It was the honesty that I appreciated, you know? And ok, "Do you want an Eno, must I buy you an Eno?" or something like that. But we were there for each other'.*

*Lawona, TPG member*

While the amount of member participation in the TPG was both a cause and effect of the theatrical activities that we undertook together, the community that we had formed was strong enough to support an individual, temporary lapse in participation. Forming the bonds that a community share resulted in the blossoming of what Gardner (1991) calls 'the ingredients of community' (Gardner cit. Walter, 2002: 73) – some of which include shared vision, sense of purpose and values, wholeness incorporating diversity, caring, trust, teamwork, respect and recognition, communication and affirmation. While communities are seldom homogenous (the TPG community included) with all members sharing the same values and ideals, there did not exist a spirit of spite or resentment amongst the TPG. While the team was important, and to this effect participation essential, concern and support were also offered regarding the well-being of individual group-members.



The principle of participation was extended into the play about teenage pregnancy that toured to the schools. As Erica commented:

*'... the thing is to get the audience to participate, you know? And I think we did that. That we did very well, getting them to participate and letting them know that they are also part of it, that they can also take ownership of the play.'*

*Erica, TPG member*

This was in contrast to the more traditional methods of sexual education that learners (and the TPG members) were familiar with, whereby they receive a talk by a specialist or watch a video about the subject matter. All the TPG members mentioned that one of the qualities that made the play successful was that the learners had the opportunity to participate in the program. By breaking the common lecture format of sexual education, the TPG presented the learners with an entirely new, interactive way of approaching the material. Rather than purporting to be authorities on the subject, creating space for the learners to participate in the program created a situation where the TPG members were spurs to the learners' own discoveries. By appealing to them for help and guidance or inciting them with shameless 'bad' behaviour, the actors placed the responsibility for the characters making the correct decisions in the hands of the learners.

It is natural that in every school there were some youngsters who were reticent to participate. Teen self-consciousness is to be expected, with certain learners not speaking up when asked for responses by the actors. On the whole, however, the learners bought into the format of the play and were willing participants. Chantal describes the repercussions of this in the context of one of the schools in which we performed. During the second interaction stage of the play, when she asked her group in role whether she should have sex with Shawn or not, the group had told her that she should. The play had then continued and, according to the narrative, the two protagonists decided to wait until they were older. When Chantal returned to her group of learners for the reflection and discussion session at the end of her play, she describes how:

*'They said that if I had to do it they would have almost, like, blamed themselves, so they said it also opened up their minds to what they said themselves because they have to count what they say to people, because their last words to a person can actually affect a person's whole life.'*

*Chantal, TPG member*

Such sentiments at least partially alleviate a central concern of mine throughout the performances. I was troubled by the fact that the characters appealed to the learners for guidance, and then did not follow through on what they had suggested. Was this not akin to what Minkler and Pies refer to as 'symbolic participation' (Minkler & Pies, 2002: 127), in which input is sought and then discounted, further reinforcing unequal power relations? Although Chantal's group had told Zoe that she should sleep with Shawn, this hadn't happened. Could this not suggest to the learners that their decisions did not actually have repercussions and thus detract from the validity of the interactive theatre event? Surely it would have been more effective for the learners to have to work through the repercussions of their suggestions, for example by seeing Zoe getting pregnant or contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease? One would expect that this would be more likely to discourage them from having sex. This issue remains unresolved for me, but Chantal's experience makes it clear that through participation and interaction, the learners were able to identify with the characters. This raised the stakes regarding what happened to them and created genuine care and concern for the characters.

Another interesting incident related to participation is described by Lawona. In one of the schools where the play was performed, her group told her, in role as the mother, that they had seen Zoe (her daughter) and Shawn kiss on the soccer field. Where this group differed to groups from previous schools was that instead of simply just reporting what they had seen as audience members, they actually inserted themselves into the world of the play. As Lawona reports:

*'... they put themselves in the play and that is what made the difference. Because they would say, "We were playing on the other side of the field". ...It's not to say*

*“but we heard” or “we saw in the play”, but that they were actually part of it and that was nice.’*

*Lawona, TPG member*

According to Lawona, this only happened in one school, but it does show the depth at which the learners identified with the play that we presented to them. This may in turn be attributed to the participation of learners much earlier in the process. As described earlier, in the beginning stages of the TPG project Lawona, Erica and I had visited three schools in Delft in order to get a sense of the perceptions surrounding teenage pregnancy amongst Grade 7 youths in the area. This information served not only to inform us as to our target audience’s concerns and understandings around sexual behaviour, but to provide us with information that could be used to pitch our program appropriately. For example, the learners told us the name of a popular nightclub, ‘Zeeto’s’. We incorporated this into the play as the place where the protagonists, Shawn and Zoe meet. Also, the slang that the learners used was included in the dialogue between the characters in the play.

This reveals a double motion at play in terms of participation within the TPG play. Because the learners participated in the development of the play, they were able to relate to it in performance, which encouraged them to participate in the group work when it came to their schools a few months later. While they had not been a part of the immediate community working daily to devise scenes and create a play, their contribution was evident throughout the process. Walter’s definition of community as a ‘multidimensional/dynamic whole or system of which we are a part’ (Walter, 2002: 70) encompasses this relationship well. She posits that every organisation and every person at every level within both the horizontal and vertical dimensions is potentially part of a community (Walter, 2002: 70). It is my understanding that by having an opportunity to participate in the TPG play, the learners with whom the play was performed became a part of the TPG community. As Selznick (1992) states: ‘The more pathways are provided for participation in diverse ways and touching multiple interests... the richer is the experience of community’ (Selznick cit. Walter, 2002: 73).

## 5.2. Learning and Teaching

It is clear from the interviews that the process that Freire deems necessary for true transformation to occur – that all involved in an initiative become both teachers and students (*Freire, 1972*) – was at play during the TPG project. In their responses, the actors articulate their experience of being a part of the TPG both in terms of how much they learnt and what they had the opportunity to teach. This represents a move away from more traditional methods of community development where an outside individual or organisation enters a community in order to impart knowledge that will lead to change. The TPG project was a chance for the participants to locate themselves within the world, realising both that the wealth of knowledge that they possessed that could be shared with others and how much there still was for them to learn. The term ‘opening up’ was used often throughout all of the interviews – an apt descriptor for the process whereby those involved became aware of the possibilities of the sharing of knowledge between one another.

Describing the effects of the three exploratory sessions Chantal recalled,

*‘...bonding with people I don’t actually know from no ends of earth. People that I’ve never met before. And hearing from them their sides of stories of life and... seeing that there are so many things in life that I haven’t actually seen, I haven’t actually known. And seeing that even though the people we worked with, I always used to see them in an upper-class world, and just to see no, they’re actually from exactly the same world as I am.’*

*Chantal, TPG member*

Her words echo sentiments voiced by all of the actors, who articulate in their interviews how much the TPG experience was rooted in our real lives. The process was not simply a mechanical one, whereby a tried-and-tested theatre-making formula was applied, with those involved mere pawns in the process. Sharing through the icebreakers, role-plays and discussions, our life stories unfolding as the days progressed, we became aware of the experiences that our fellow TPG members had been through in their lives. This

served dual purposes – as Chantal describes, it served to bond us as a group, which was integral to the community building process, and it provided us with a pool of information that could be included in the narrative of the play. As Erica said about getting to know the group,

*'... it helped us improvise. And to understand better because we had a lot of knowledge, because everybody would take part in what they felt about the question. And we could use it. Because sometimes you think you know, but you don't know, and then somebody else comes along and you can pick up, you know, that information, and then you can use it.'*

*Erica, TPG member*

At this stage it is useful to reiterate that while it is my understanding that those involved with the TPG came together to form a community over the course of the project, no community is wholly homogenous. In *The poverty of practice: power, gender and intervention from an actor-oriented perspective*, Magdalena Villareal (1992) highlights the issue of the constituency of the group. She explains that even though any community, in order to be distinctive, necessarily has some sort of homogenous identity that sets it apart from other communities, there most probably exists 'considerable heterogeneity' (Villareal, 1992: 155) within its ranks. Differences in age, race, gender and life experience lead to complexities in the power make-up of the group and we certainly encountered these during the TPG process. Certainly, locating myself within the process so that I was not seen as the outsider imposing all the correct answers on the rest of the group was a challenge. Lawona and Erica, who were older professionals held a higher status than the rest of the team in terms of employment. Yet, through the processes that we undertook as a group, especially the icebreakers, role-plays, playmaking process and discussions that everybody took part in, we were all able to, ostensibly, start on the same page. The dramatic medium is a great leveller; especially with people unaccustomed to the medium, creating a situation whereby everybody is going through a new experience at the same time serves to start participants off on the same level, irrespective of their life stories. While the techniques do not attempt to paper over the differences between the TPG members, they do provide a platform

whereby equal sharing can occur amongst them. Opening themselves up to learning about one another made it possible for the TPG members to deal openly with the complexities within the group. This is in line with Cohen's (1985) aforementioned assertion that *communitas*, the sense of community, may only symbolically unite a group of people, reinforcing commonalities and concealing difference. This leads to the development of a symbolic – not real – community. Through the use of a medium which is able to support divergent identities and the complexities that ensue from this, theatre and drama strategies provide for the possibility of the creation of Cohen's ideal of a 'real' community.

The interviews indicate that the TPG members learnt about their team-mates, about the learners and about other ways of life. By drawing so greatly on their own lives in the devising stages of the theatre-making process, the TPG members shared the lessons that they had already learnt in their own lives or during the process with the learners. Fawziyah describes how:

*'Die characters wat ons gespeel het was baie goed. Because why? Elke character is... elke character het hulle eie lewe gespeel.'*

*(The characters we played were very good. Because why? Every character is... every character played their own lives.)*

*Fawziyah, TPG member*

It wasn't until Fawziyah pointed this out that I realised that indeed, every actor had developed a character that very closely mirrored their own experiences and personalities. This could be explained away with the (quite plausible) platitude that people draw on their own lives in improvisation, but I believe that the issue runs deeper than this. By portraying their own experiences to the learners, the TPG members were creating opportunities for their audiences to learn from their mistakes and successes. Was it a coincidence that Fawziyah and Graeme, both teen parents themselves, played the antagonists? Fawziyah's character Janine, Zoe's best friend, only reveals to Zoe that she is a teen mother near the end of the play, and it is partially her predicament that

leads to her friend's decision not to have sex with Shawn. This is very much in line with Fawziyah's aims for the play:

*'Om saam met jong kinders te praat en sien dat ek myself 'n jong ma is vir hulle te tell van experience en net for hulle hulle mind open to maak because dit is alledags se lewe.'*

*(To talk with young children and, seeing that I am a young mother myself, to tell them about the experience and for them to open their minds because it is everyday life)*

*Fawziyah, TPG member*

By portraying two 'good' teenagers (Zoe and Shawn) and two 'naughty' teenagers (Justin and Janine) in the narrative, we were clearly establishing role-models and, what I term 'anti-role-models' for the learners to observe and react to. It was hoped that in this way they would learn to make positive decisions regarding sexual behaviour. We were careful to keep certain checks in place, however, so that the characters did not become stereotypes of 'the drug-abusing gangster' or 'the disinterested mother'. The learners would quickly have lost interest in these characters as they would have lacked sufficient depth to be believable. With many of the women in Delft employed in the clothing and textile industries, we tried to make it clear that the reason that Zoe and Justin's mother was unable to engage fully with her children was because she was working long hours each day in a factory, leaving early in the morning and returning home exhausted late at night. Her husband had died years earlier, with the lack of a father-figure perhaps a contributor to Justin's bad behaviour. We wanted the learners to realise that although life may be hard, they still have the power to make positive choices, as Zoe did. Of course, in cases of abuse or rape, this choice is taken away, but by the making itself visible to the learners through their association with the play, the Delft clinic presented itself as a resource that was at their disposal in such a situation.

Through their participation in the TPG play, the learners also had the opportunity to experience both learning and teaching. Watching a narrative grounded in their familiar context played out before them and then having the opportunity to interact with the

characters was an important learning experience, in line with Freire's notion of education for critical consciousness. By recognising their own stories on stage, the learners were able to become the subjects of their own learning. In discussion with the actors in role, giving their suggestions and opinions about what actions the characters should take, they joined in to become co-participants in the creation of a jointly understood reality. The dialogue and to-and-fro debate with the characters allowed the learners to 'engage in critical reflection to analyse the societal context for personal problems and their own role in working on the problems' (*Wallerstein et al, 2002: 197*). When reflecting on the experience with the actors (now out of role) in the final interactive session of the play, the learners were again able to share their opinions with the rest of the group – this time on a more general level than when dealing specifically with the narrative of the play. Here, the issues that they saw in the play could be grappled with more deeply, and related back to their own life experiences.

It is interesting that in a number of schools, situations were reported where learners would linger behind after the play was over and the crowds had dissipated in order to speak privately to the actor who had facilitated their group. They did this in order to share their own experiences relating to what they had seen in the play. The facilitators spoke to a girl who had been raped, another who had had an abortion and one who said that she too was being pressured by her best friend to have sex. In these situations, the facilitators offered what support they could, referring the youngsters to the clinic or their school counsellors for further help. Putting real faces to these social issues was certainly eye-opening for the facilitators. Interestingly, the two men in the cast, Graeme and Shawn did not report having been involved in such a situation.

The aim was that through contributing guidance and support to the characters, the learners would be empowered to take control of their own lives. It was hoped that in realising the impact that their suggestions could make on the characters' fictitious lives, the learners would understand the power that they have to make positive choices in their own lives. Instead of simply being lectured about right/wrong ways of living their lives, the learners were given an opportunity to immerse themselves in a make-believe situation in which they were able to 'test-drive' their beliefs and understandings around



teenage pregnancy, peer-pressure and the experience of being a young adult in Delft. This was, in Boalian terms, an opportunity for the learners to train themselves for real-life action (*Boal, 1985: 122*). Coming to conclusions about what action to take themselves is far more effective in terms of creating real changes in behaviour than didactic finger-wagging methods of education, where someone else holds all the power, knowledge and information.

The advantage of creating a situation in which both the TPG members and learners involved in the TPG program had the opportunity to be teachers *and* students is that it contributed to the elimination of traditional hierarchical separations between people involved in a development initiative. In Walter's reconceptualisation of community as a system of which we are a part (*Walter, 2002: 70*), we come to understand that in order to build community, we need to 'build the capacity of the entire system, and all of its participants' (*Walter, 2002: 69*). Indeed, from a personal perspective, my competence was enhanced as I learnt about different ways of life from the other group-members, tried and tested facilitative methodologies, developed a new understanding of teenage pregnancy and located a new focus for my Masters study. The icebreakers, role-plays, devising process and discussions that we undertook as a group certainly 'opened' us up, so that we were able to share our personal knowledge and be accepting of the new ways of thinking, beliefs and values brought to the fore by our team-mates.

### **5.3. Self and Team**

This leads into the third theme which emerged from the interviews with the actors – that of the development of both self and team. The reconceptualisation of community implied by community building practice calls for an entirely new way of understanding the very structure of society. Instead of the transformation process occurring in a top-down manner, initiated by the few in power for the good of the masses, every person involved with the issue at hand is viewed as a participant in the attempt to achieve common goals. Those from organisations that were previously understood as outsiders

become part of the same community as those closer to the developmental issue, and everybody works together in the fulfilment of their goals.

In order for this to happen, processes must be put in place which ensures that the emphasis is placed both on the development of the individuals and of the team involved. Focusing solely on the development of the individual may result in a situation whereby certain people thrive through their experiences of being involved in an initiative to such an extent that they outgrow the framework of the initiative and move away from the cause for which they were initially trained. This then represents a significant loss of resources in terms of time or money that were most probably invested in this individual in the hope that he/she would contribute back to the initiative. Putting emphasis solely on the development of the team may have a similarly adverse effect in the overall scheme of things as, while individuals may be very adept at working together, they may not possess the skills, self-confidence and self-efficacy to make the on-the-spot decisions often required to ensure the smooth running of such initiatives. Also, the ethical correctness of recruiting a group of people to provide man-power in the achievement of a goal, without offering them the opportunity to gain something from the experience is certainly questionable.

The TPG project provided a framework for the simultaneous development of the team and the individual. This is evident from the responses offered by the TPG members in the interviews about their experiences, in which each actor placed emphasis on the tight-knit quality of the TPG team. Ostensibly, we all began as strangers - although Lawona and Erica work together and the other actors recognised one another from around Delft, it was through the process that we undertook together that a sense of shared identity began to be fostered. Although community building practice draws from Warren's (1963) theory that for each episode of action an ad hoc body necessarily emerges or is formed (*Warren cit. Walter, 2002: 71*), it appears to me that the efficacy of this body, or community, lies in its ability to function effectively. A community made up of individuals with conflicting agendas who are unable to locate a common ground where they can communicate seems doomed to function below par. The icebreakers, improvisations, discussions, playmaking and performances that the TPG members

participated in together provided us all with the opportunity to learn valuable lessons about teamwork. The nature of the process of devising a piece of theatre sees a number of people, with often divergent visions for the piece, working together on a daily basis to create a single finished product that satisfies everybody involved. This provides an ideal framework for those involved to develop the qualities necessary for effective teamwork, including trust, loyalty, listening-skills and negotiation.

Regarding the exploratory phase of the process, Lawona describes her reaction to sharing experiences with the younger actors in the group:

*'...that's why today I have such a lot of respect for those children. Because they shared a lot, they weren't shy, they trusted each other and I got to learn a lot from them.'*

*Lawona, TPG member*

Drawing on our own life experiences through drama-based exercises and games, as well as through discussions and reflections, enabled us to get to know one another better. As Lawona explains, sharing our life-stories with our team-mates, and learning about their experiences, had the effect of creating respect and trust among the group. The democratic atmosphere that I tried to create in workshops and rehearsals was intended to create possibilities for people to feel free to offer suggestions. We would try these out and, if they were effective, they would be adopted. I hoped that this would create a milieu in which every team-member realised that they were valued and important to the TPG project. Coming to such a realisation would go on to contribute to the TPG members understanding how indispensable each actor was to the team, which would subsequently lead to the team growing closer and stronger. In her interview, Fawziyah shared her opinion that *'Die groepstyl het dit goed gemaak...nie een van ons kan dit selfs gedoen het nie.'* (The style of the group made it good...not one of us could have done it by ourselves).

But the team processes did not always flow smoothly and harmoniously. Learning how to work together as a team often included arguments and misunderstandings. Two of the

TPG members described situations in which they had been disappointed by a team-mate's behaviour. In both accounts, the actors had expected a certain level of straight-talk and honesty from those with whom they were working, and had felt that this was not forthcoming. Another two of the TPG members had an extremely volatile relationship that often threatened to flare up, although only once did it result in a direct confrontation. Yet, there was a sense throughout the program that the task that the TPG members had been recruited to fulfil was more important than the inner-group tensions. As Shawn explains, *'we had our bad times, but I wouldn't say it was terrible because we sorted out our differences between people.'*

Being able to resolve conflicts such as those touched on above was an important quality that the TPG developed and was able to utilise throughout the duration of the program. I believe that this was one of the attributes that served to make the team so effective. Working together, the TPG members found ways of addressing their differences so as to maintain the integrity of the group.

*'I love the fact that we were very open and honest with each other and we could say something to each other and the next person wouldn't be offended, you know? Umm, but you also have to choose a way to say it so that the person don't take offence to that.'*

*Lawona, TPG member*

Negotiating ways to voice opinions so that they caused the least possible harm and offence was important for the general ethos of the group. The very fact that the TPG members cared enough about each other and the project not to want to distress one another in a way that could have been damaging to the process is a testament to their commitment to the team. By finding ways to compromise rather than ignoring conflict or allowing it to overtake the whole process, the TPG put the greater good of the project before their own personal feelings. This is indicative of both their respect for the team and their dedication to it.

Recounting the effects of their participation in the TPG project, the TPG members also describe changes in terms of their personal development. The fact that they experienced the process as such is telling evidence for my hypothesis that applied theatre can be a useful way of carrying out community building practice principles.

*'The kids are still talking about it. Because every time I come at night, I come work here by Delft police station... I come ride around. Then I hear, 'There goes Justin, there goes Justin!'*

*Graeme, TPG member*

Graeme's experience is not unique. All four of the younger actors reported being stopped in the street in Delft at different times by children who recognised them from the performances at the schools. As unemployed youths in a sub-economic township, receiving the affirmation and admiration that their participation in the TPG bestowed upon them certainly impacted on the way they felt about themselves. Apart from the pride and consequent increase in self-confidence that such recognition afforded them, in several instances the TPG members articulated other ways that actually being a part of the TPG process had affected them.

*'I think it's the way I speak to people in situations, it's different man. It's not... it used to be if I was in a rough situation I used to just fight, but now I speak. If you have a problem, tell me what's your problem, what I did wrong... Now we sort our problems by talking, I don't fight anymore. I'm not wild. I'm more down-to-earth.'*

*Shawn, TPG member*

Engaging in improvisations which dealt with often volatile situations and trying to determine which course of action would be best for their characters gave the TPG members an opportunity to develop new coping methods for their real lives. Devising a play with a group of other people requires that one develop patience, stamina and negotiation skills as one makes one's suggestions heard. Communication skills are

improved as one tries to put forward one's ideas – both verbally and physically. Chantal describes how:

*'It was actually quite cool for me to see that just by using a pen or using some Pritt and some paper I could actually express myself.'*

*Chantal, TPG member*

Not simply acquiring new abilities but the qualities developed through realising that one now has a host of skills at one's disposal is an important step in developing as an individual. While Chantal certainly learnt how to make collages as an expression of one's changing attitudes to sex, a medium that she could one day utilise again as a tool for social expression, she was also able to reflect on and feel positive about the acquisition of this new skill. Similarly, having facilitated the TPG, I now know that I possess the skills to do this sort of work. But for me, the greatest realm of growth was the consequent increase of self-confidence that having been a part of the TPG afforded me. Being so nervous at the start of the program and subsequently having played a part in developing what I believe was a successful piece of applied theatre has instilled in me a sense of self-belief that I did not possess before. This sense has been transported beyond the TPG project into other areas of my life, giving me confidence to tackle other daunting tasks that I now believe I will be able to complete successfully. Hopefully, a similar process has occurred for my fellow TPG members.

Through their interactions with the actors during the performances, we also tried to create opportunities for the learners to develop individually and as part of a team. In a break from traditional methods of education, we attempted to mobilise the learners so that they became active participants in the program. Requiring their participation placed a lot of power in their hands – if they had point-blank refused to join in the icebreakers and the discussions, we would not have been able to continue with the program. Placing this sort of responsibility in the hands of the learners was important for their development. Too often, the voices of school-children are disregarded because of their age, the thinking being that they are too young to be taken seriously. By steering away from this model, choosing instead to specifically draw out the opinions of the learners

and carefully consider their words, the TPG showed the learners how important they deemed them to be. In trying to foster in the learners an understanding of the importance of the choices that they make and the possible consequences of these, the TPG tried to instil in them a sense of the power that they possess to take control of their own futures. This will hopefully have led the learners to consider, however briefly, the consequences of the decisions that they make. In a best-case scenario, this would even have affected the decisions regarding sexuality that some of them were making.

By taking part in the icebreakers, offering their guidance and opinions to the characters and then joining with the actors to reflect on the experience, the learners became an inextricable part of the TPG project. While their contributions did not affect the narrative of the play, the level at which they chose to pitch their participation certainly impacted on the general atmosphere of the performances. All TPG members reported feeling more positive about some of the performances than others, and there is no doubt that this was, in part, due to the responses they were getting from the learners. By contributing so directly to the success of each performance, the learners could take ownership of the experience, and the gap suggested by Freire's banking education (Freire, 1972: 46) – traditionally between teacher and student – is closed as the learners become participants in their own learning. The learners and the actors join together as a team in a bid to maximise learning. At no point is this more clear than at the very end of the program, when the actors teach the learners the rap with which they began the play. Following the final reflection session, the actors and learners all join together in singing the song that begins: '*When we get together we are TPG united...*'. In its dual ability to nurture both self and team, applied theatre and the dramatic methodologies associated with it prove themselves useful methodologies in the implementation of community building practice principles. In the next chapter, I recount the events that occurred in the aftermath of the TPG project in order to explore the implications of these findings.

## CHAPTER 6

### The Aftermath of the TPG

Following the scheduled performances in Delft and Belhar, it was decided to extend the project, performing the play at schools in Atlantis as well. Although the program had been specifically formulated for the Delft/Belhar context, it was deemed appropriate for learners in schools in Atlantis, given that the learners were of the same age and similar social status as those for whom the project was originally designed. The plan was that following a week-long break, the TPG members would re-group for a short refresher rehearsal before performing in Atlantis.

We were all shocked when Fawziyah did not arrive at the scheduled rehearsal, given her consistent dedication to the project. Nobody knew where she was, and it took a number of phone calls to determine, via a family member, that she had found employment in the clothing and textile industry and would therefore be unable to participate in the extra performances. Fawziyah's disappearance had an intense effect on the rest of the group. After sharing the intimate TPG experience, the other members and I felt betrayed and hurt that she had turned her back on us without even saying goodbye. However, this situation highlights an issue that often exists in community projects that don't focus on the remuneration of their participants. No doubt under pressure to provide additional income for her family, Fawziyah's decision to accept the job offer becomes entirely understandable.

While we missed Fawziyah's skilful characterisation and proficient handling of the group-work with the learners, the performances in Atlantis were successful. It was lucky that Erica and Lawona originally shared the role of the mother, so that for these performances Lawona could take over the role of 'Janine'. In order to make the play more relevant to the Atlantis context, we personalised several of the references. We changed the name of the club that the characters visit to that of the local Atlantis hang-out, and in his dialogue, Shawn referred to a number of local soccer teams. These



references had the same effect as they had in Delft – the learners responded with delight, clearly enjoying seeing their lives enacted on stage.

Some weeks after the TPG program had drawn to a close, I was approached by the South African Clothing and Textile Worker's Union to help develop another applied theatre program, this time about HIV/AIDS. The program was to be performed in textile factories all over the Western Cape. Choosing to utilise the theatrical form and a similar process in another social education initiative was a vote of confidence from the Union regarding the TPG project. Initially it was understood that I would be working with the same group of actors as on the TPG project, excluding Fawziyah. However, it soon became clear that Shawn had chosen not to be a part of this second initiative. His reasons for not participating still remain unclear, as he became impossible to locate or contact immediately following his absence at rehearsals. Conceived and workshopped by Erica, Lawona, Chantal, Graeme and myself, the HIV/AIDS play performed in a number of factories, receiving enthusiastic responses from all who watched it.

### **6.1. Implications of the TPG Aftermath**

The aftermath of the TPG, which saw two of the core group-members detach themselves from the group, can be read as an indictment on the understanding of community as multidimensional and dynamic that this study adopts. Since the community that I argue was formed during the TPG ostensibly disintegrated following the performances, the reader may question the worth of exerting such effort on a community building initiative. If this viewpoint is adopted, my argument that applied theatre can be a useful medium for social development and education may be negated with the reasoning that community development initiatives need to be sustainable in order to result in real social change in the long run.

My response to such a line of thinking is that the reconceptualisation of community, as embodied by community building practice, is inherently transient. Rather than focusing on understandings of community that characterise it as permanent and static, such as a

geographical community (which obviously does not move significantly and rarely experiences radical change), community building practice draws people from all kinds of contexts together around a joint goal. As long as this goal is being pursued, people work together, contributing different skills, knowledge and understandings to make the experience as rich and effective as possible. In the process, they grow together as a group and, hopefully, individuals as they learn new skills, deepen knowledge and understanding and engage with people from backgrounds often very different to their own. Herein lies much of its worth. The TPG project should not be viewed as a blueprint for how applied theatre *should* be used when attempting to build community. Rather, this study was undertaken in order to explore the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice so that the potential that the interaction of these two fields holds for all involved can be more thoroughly understood.

The TPG project did not set out specifically to build community. Its aim was to educate learners about teenage pregnancy. Had the aim specifically been to build community, perhaps those of us involved in the project would have gone about the task differently, changing our focus from the issues surrounding teen sexuality to sustained work with the learners with whom we performed. However, having used the TPG process as a case-study to better understand how the principles of community building practice are inherent in applied theatre, I feel that I have shed light on several issues that make apparent the potential that this relationship holds for social development. These are summarised in the concluding section, which aims to sum up the main threads of my argument and tie together any loose ends that exist for the reader..

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

In a bid to gain a deeper understanding of my chosen subject matter, a thorough survey of available literature and an examination of other applied theatre projects were undertaken. This involved the investigation of South African and foreign journals, books in the areas of applied theatre and community development, as well a number of internet references. Through this literature review it became clear that during the TPG project a cycle was set in motion. Dramatic and theatrical tools were used to create a community, the constituents of which worked together to develop the play about teenage pregnancy. In turn, this play used drama and theatre strategies to get the learners to become a part of the community. In this way, the TPG community was developed and expanded. Coding the actors' interviews for their understandings of these phases of the cycle, it became apparent that three main elements of the experience stood out for them. True participation in the theatre-making process, the opportunity for participants to experience teaching and learning simultaneously and an emphasis on the development of both self and team characterised their experience of the TPG project.

Examining the link between these three elements and the central principles of community building practice (as highlighted in the literature review section of this study) serves to crystallise my understanding of the nature of the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice. The community that was formed during the TPG was a multidimensional system, including both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Thus, while the project was specifically targeted at youth in Delft and Belhar, many outside units were brought in to work on the program. These include members of the South African Clothing and Textile Worker's Union, medical staff from the clinic in Delft and representatives from the University of Cape Town. Because members of these different units possessed knowledge and skills in divergent areas (and were consequently lacking in some areas), there was an opportunity both to learn from those with whom we worked, and to share our specialities with the other members of

the group. In doing so, the TPG members developed as individuals as well as a team, bonding as we pursued the achievement of a shared goal.

Another central principle of community building practice is that community resources should be recognised and utilised. This in itself is affirming as all involved seek out the possibilities and potential capacities of those with whom they work. The TPG project thrived on the contributions of those involved with it. Individuals who are not regularly valued and lauded, for example unemployed youths and teenage learners, were an integral part of the project. By relying so heavily on their input in order to be successful, the TPG project drew on their wisdom, talent, knowledge and abilities in order to create and perform the play. Also, the development that takes place in community building practice is 'of and by' the community. This sets the stage for the true participation experienced by the TPG members. Participation in the TPG became an opportunity for the resources of all of those involved to be utilised and valued. This extended beyond tokenism, which carries the implication of participation without authority. By opening ourselves up to the prospect of learning from others and giving of ourselves, whilst simultaneously growing as individuals and as a team, the participants in the TPG project became conduits for a horizontal flow of information, experiences and skills between constituents that became invaluable resources in the progress of the applied theatre project.

Community building practice centres on the principle of community as dynamic and liable to change continuously. This was certainly evident in the community that was formed during the TPG initiative. Certain participants dropped out of its folds at different stages, and the clinic staff, Prof. Morris and staff from the South African Clothing and Textile Worker's Union fluctuated in the intensity of their participation. Yet, herein lies the core strength of using applied theatre as a vehicle for social development. Because no hard-and-fast rules dictated who could participate, and how deep their engagement with the project could become, the TPG play was able to strengthen through everybody's contributions. Each of the individuals involved in the TPG project, including medical staff, school principals and teachers, theatre specialists, unemployed youths and school children, played a part in the TPG's success. In fact,

their differences in age, sex, point of view and social background significantly enriched the play that was performed in schools by providing multiple ideologies, unique artistic suggestions and new ways of understanding the subject matter with which we were dealing.

Of course, this study has only delved deeply into the TPG project and its findings cannot be generalised to be true for all applied theatre projects. I do however believe that establishing the link between applied theatre and community building practice has uncovered the potential of drama and theatre for the pursuit of social development that embodies Freire's transformation of the structure of society. By drawing together a community in which the constituents, who were of various ages, races, classes and gender, were all actively involved in and had a stake in the issue at hand, the traditional dichotomous social divisions between rich/poor, white/black, young/old, insider/outsider and expert/layman (to name but a few) were supplanted by a milieu in which all parties valued one another for what they contributed.

Reflecting back on my TPG experience with over a year's worth of critical distance permitting me a certain level of clarity, it seems likely that the program would have been more effective had the process whereby the TPG community was formed been able to continue. Had the learners, who became a part of the TPG community, been given the opportunity to create their own pieces of theatre that went on to be performed for more people in Delft, Belhar and Atlantis, the community would have expanded even further. With adequate time and financial resources, this could prove a useful means of community building, developing connections between people in the neighbourhood and facilitating the exploration and dissemination of important social issues. The possibilities of such an undertaking would also provide an excellent opportunity for further applied research in this area.

In this study I have attempted to investigate the relationship between applied theatre and community building practice. Doing so has provided me with a rich theoretical framework for what I believe could become a very useful method of community building. Trying to reflect critically on a process with which I was so intimately

involved has raised complex issues, especially in terms of power. As a researcher, I have imposed an order on the words of my co-participants, ostensibly picking and choosing what I believe to be most vital to my argument and then deciding how this data should be represented. The type of applied theatre facilitator I aspire to be, however, is diametrically opposed to this vision of an all-powerful researcher. I don't want to purport to have all the answers. Not only would this almost certainly be untrue, but I believe that any applied theatre piece is made so much richer by the contribution of a multitude of different stakeholders and that it is through the process of participation in the development of the piece itself that important community empowerment is achieved. Understanding community as dynamic and multidimensional, and my position within this system as simply one of many elements working together for the achievement of a common goal, provides a contextual framework from which I can try to mould myself into the kind of facilitator I hope one day to become.

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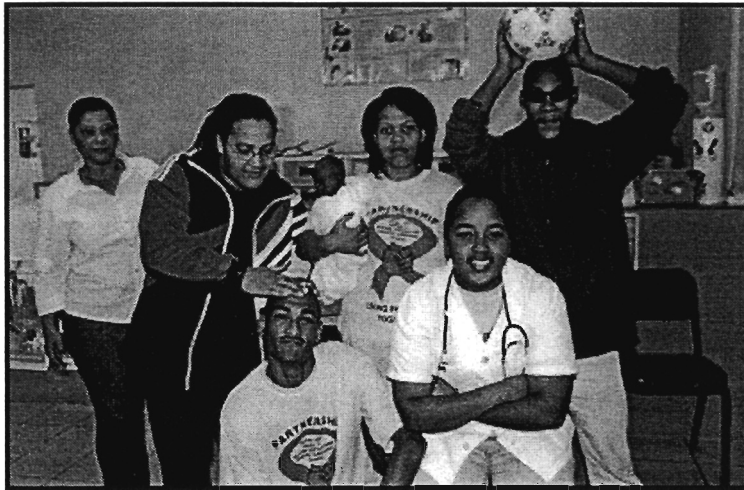
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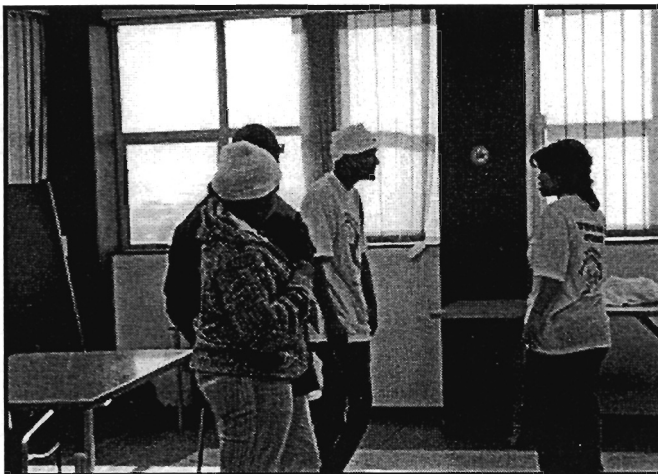
## APPENDIX 1: Photographs of the TPG

### The Teenage Pregnancy Group

(From Left. Top: Lawona, Erica, Fawziyah, Shawn. Bottom: Graeme, Chantal)



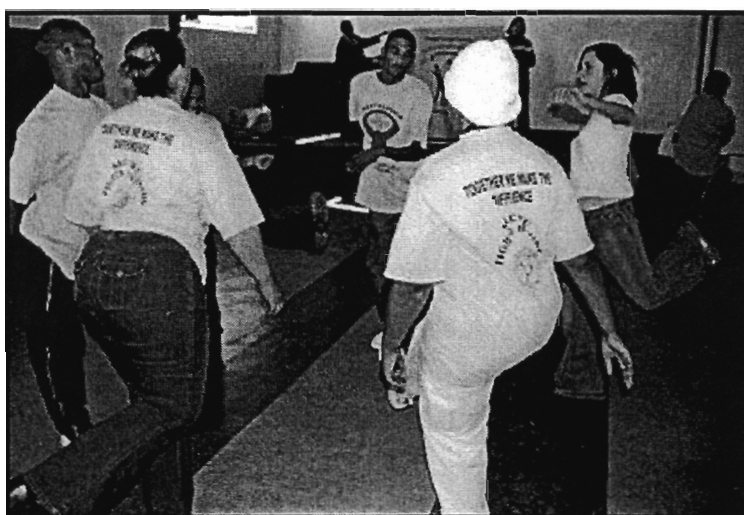
### Devising the play in rehearsals



Devising another scene



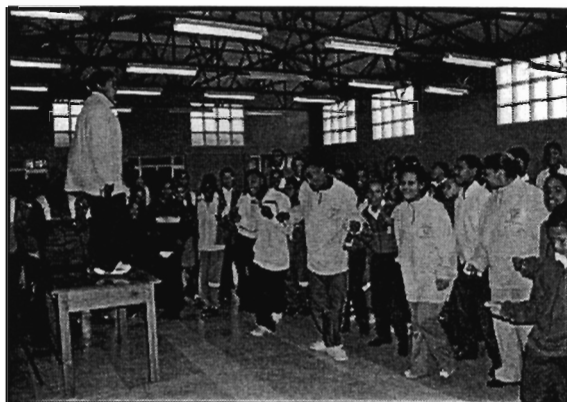
Warming up before a performance



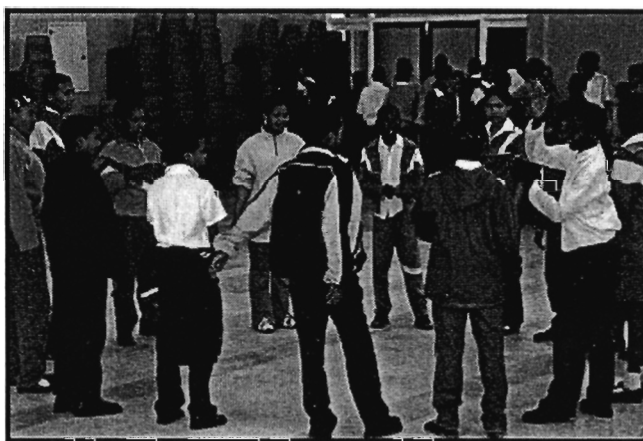
**Performing for the learners**



**Involving the learners in the final rap**



**Fawziyah leading icebreakers with a group of learners**



**Graeme in discussion with a group of learners**



## APPENDIX 2: Teacher's Pack

Resource given to teachers at the schools at which we performed

**AUGUST 2004**

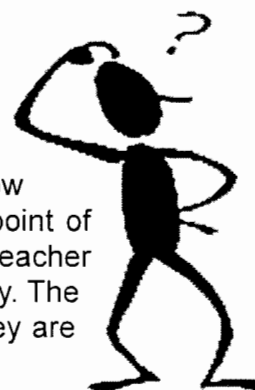
Dear Teacher,

We hope you and your learners enjoyed our program around the subject of teenage-pregnancy. What follows is a short summary of the plot of the play and then some suggestions for extended work and some useful websites and phone numbers. We strongly believe that the issues highlighted in this play can be more deeply explored through this kind of extended work with the learners. This way, they can actively engage with the material, thus learning through 'doing' as opposed to simply through 'viewing' the play.

### Extended work:

Some possibilities for extended work are:

- The girls can imagine they are Janine. They can write a journal or diary entry describing their situation and how they feel about their life. They can either choose any point of the play (or the 10 years following) to focus on, or the teacher can stipulate a specific period of time for the journal entry. The boys can complete a similar exercise, imagining that they are Justin or Shawn.
- The girls can imagine that they are Zoe and the boys can imagine that they are Shawn. Zoe and Shawn have been asked to write an article for 'Seventeen' or 'Men's Health' magazine about why they decided to abstain from sex. The learners can write this article in-role.
- In pairs, the learners can role-play various scenarios arising from the narrative of the play.
  - E.g. Janine can be interviewed by a prospective employer for a job at a factory.
  - OR Shawn can be interviewed by a television sport's presenter about being the youngest Bafana player ever and the responsibilities and pressures that go with that.
  - OR Dr. Zoe can be treating a young girl of 15 who has fallen pregnant. Other learners can play the girl's mother and her father.
  - OR A social worker can be counselling Zoe's mother about talking to her daughter about sex.
- In pairs, the learners can create an A3 poster entitled 'EVERYTHING YOU MOST WANT TO KNOW ABOUT SEX'. Using cartoons, diagrams, small bits of first-person narrative, short poems and lots of colour, the learners should



try to make their posters as exciting and stimulating as possible. Perhaps these posters can be hung up somewhere prominent in the school?

- The story of the play can be turned into a class-created comic strip. Let the learners draw scenes from the original play as well as made-up new ones. E.g. Zoe goes to the clinic to ask the clinic sister about having sex and using protection. OR. Shawn makes a list of the pros and cons of having a fully sexual relationship with Zoe.
- In groups of 5 the learners can write a short piece with the title 'ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF TEENAGE CHILDREN: DO'S AND DON'TS'. They should try to combine light-hearted items with real advice for parents. (Remember – nobody has classes in being a parent: it's a job you learn as you go along!)

The possibilities are endless. Such work will help develop learners writing, speaking, creative and performance skills, while also causing them to dig deeper into their own opinions and beliefs regarding issues such as teenage sexuality, pregnancy and abstinence. This is where real learning happens! Perhaps some of the work can be showcased to the rest of the school, adding an element of self-affirmation to the learner's process? Enjoy!

### The play



Ever since her father died two years ago, 15-year-old Zoe Adams from Delft is finding it hard to deal with her family-life. Her mother works all day in order to support the family and returns home in the evenings tired and lacking in energy. Her 18 year-old brother, Justin, is a gangster who spends most of his time sitting on the stoep. Zoe, however, is dedicated to her dream of becoming a doctor, and therefore puts much time and effort into her schoolwork.

After a flare-up with her family, Zoe goes to her older, worldlier best friend Janine. The seemingly carefree Janine's solution is to enjoy life and join her on the jol that evening. At the club she introduces Zoe to Shawn, a handsome soccer-playing boy she knows from school. They hit it off immediately and Zoe agrees to go on a date with him. Janine leaves the club early in response to a mystery phone-call she receives.

After Zoe and Shawn have been going out for a month, Janine asks Zoe for details about the status of the physical relationship between the couple. When Zoe confirms that she has not had sex with Shawn, Janine teases her for still being a virgin and tries to talk her in to having sex. Another mystery phone call puts an end to the conversation, and Janine leaves to go home. On her way she bumps into Shawn and teases him too for not yet having sex with Zoe.

The next time we meet Zoe, she is extremely angry with Justin who is watching television at their house. She storms into the room and confronts

him about stealing R100 that she had got from her mother to pay for textbooks. Despite his denials, it is clear that he has done this. Upset, she leaves the house. Soon afterwards Shawn arrives to visit Zoe. Justin lets him in and sits him down and begins to interrogate him about his sex life with Zoe, calling him a 'bunny' and a 'moffie'. Feeling the pressure, Shawn eventually leaves the house.

Later, while Shawn is on the field practising his soccer, Zoe arrives crying. She explains what has happened and he comforts her. They begin to kiss. He says to her 'Is jy gereed?'. She answers, 'Het jy 'n condom?'. He does, and they begin to leave.

*\*\*\*\*\*At this point the action of the play breaks and the various actors talk to their groups in role as their characters\*\*\*\*\**

As Shawn and Zoe are about to leave together they are stopped by Shawn's soccer coach who calls them back. Shawn is forced to go back to practice and Zoe leaves, frustrated. The coach tells Shawn about his life – his dreams were spoilt when he made a girl pregnant when he was young and had to stop soccer so that he could get a job to support the child and the mother of the child. He explains that he doesn't want the same thing to happen to Shawn.

Later that day a confused Zoe tries to talk to her mother about sex, asking her how old she was when she first had sex. Her mother reacts strongly, refusing to engage with her daughter on the subject of sex, claiming that Zoe is too young to be asking questions about sex and that she should first concentrate on her schoolwork before she starts thinking about things like that.

Undeterred, Zoe goes over to Janine's house in order to tell her that she thinks that she is ready to sleep with Shawn. Janine is visibly hassled when she answers the door and it is clear that she is not comfortable with the idea that Zoe is there. It emerges that Janine has her own baby! That's the reason why she keeps having to rush home! The father of the baby is the owner of Zeetos's son, a 28 year-old man who wooed her with promises and gifts. Once she became pregnant, he left her. Janine places the baby in Zoe's arms, saying, 'As jy met Shawn wou slaap, dit is jou toekoms'. Zoe gives the baby back to Janine and leaves her house.

The next day Shawn is helping Zoe with her homework at her house. Once again they begin to kiss. He asks again, 'Is jy gereed?'. She looks at him... and replies, 'Ek weet nie'. He says, 'Ek weet ook nie', relieved. For the first time they talk properly about sex to one another, describing the pressure they feel they've been under from people to have sex. Since Zoe wants to be a doctor and Shawn wants to play for Bafana-bafana, they decide that they are not yet ready to have sex. Together they make the decision to abstain.



**10 years later:**

Janine has 3 children and another on the way. They all have different fathers. She wonders how she's going to pay the bills on R170 a month.

Shawn is a soccer player playing for Bafana-bafana.

Zoe is a doctor, earning good money. Ten years earlier she chose to abstain and she made the right decision – what will the children watching the play do?

**Useful phone numbers and websites:**

<b>Lifeline:</b>	0861 322 322
<b>LoveLife:</b>	<a href="http://www.lovelife.org.za">www.lovelife.org.za</a>
<b>PPASA (Planned Parenthood association of South Africa):</b>	<a href="http://www.ppasa.org.za/">http://www.ppasa.org.za/</a>
<b>Teenwire:</b>	<a href="http://www.teenwire.com/index.asp">http://www.teenwire.com/index.asp</a>

## **APPENDIX 3: Interview Schedule**

### **Interview questions administered to the TPG actors**

What do you feel were the aims of the program?

To what extent do you feel these aims were fulfilled?

What were your personal aims when accepting to become a part of this program?

Do you feel you achieved these?

In what way, if any, has being a part of the TPG group affected you?

#### **Auditions:**

What was your experience of the audition process?

Had you ever done anything like this before?

After completing the two days of auditions, how did you feel about the prospect of being part of this program?

#### **Exploratory workshops:**

What do you remember from these three sessions?

Did these three sessions effect the way you looked at teenage pregnancy in any way?

How?

#### **Rehearsals:**

How did we move from the exploratory workshops into making a play?

How did you feel about this process?

How involved did you feel in this process?

#### **Performances:**

How were you affected by performing for the children?

What was your experience of talking to the learners in-role?